

# The role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents

by

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Date

## **SUMMARY**

A combination of an exploratory and descriptive study together with an approach containing elements of both the quantitative and qualitative approach was chosen in order to obtain knowledge of and insight into the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. The motivation for this study arose from the awareness of the lack of South African literature on the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents as well as the lack of accessible information about social workers' use of reconstruction services in the reunification of foster children and biological parents in South Africa. The researcher became aware of this lack in South African literature about family reunification services and programmes delivered during a preliminary search done on the Nexus Data-Base (1999). The aim of the study is therefore to gain a better understanding of how social workers render reconstruction services to contribute to the reunification process of foster children with their biological parents in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

The literature study first focused on the process and procedures of statutory removal of children within the South African context of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 to gain a better understanding of the circumstances where the removal of children is justifiable according to the Act. The literature study was also undertaken to gain insight into the decisions social workers make when placing children in foster care as well as the services social workers deliver to foster parents, biological parents and foster children during reconstruction service delivery. The role of the social worker in the delivery of foster care and reconstruction services was explored, where the social development and strengths perspectives have become the norm, guiding social workers to engage in a range of interventions as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004).

The researcher involved 21 social workers in this study who render reconstruction services with both children and their parents in selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rendering child and family welfare services in the Strand, Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Kuils River and the Department of Social Services in Paarl.

The results of the investigation largely confirmed the findings of the literature study namely that a large number of children are removed from parental care (the biological parents), and need reconstruction services from child welfare organizations in South Africa where social workers are the catalysts in rendering such services. Social workers however, due to the lack of sufficient resources such as time and sufficient numbers, do not have the ability to deliver reconstruction services to sustain and enhance the prompt return of children to their biological parents.

The results therefore gave a good indication of social workers' delivery of reconstruction services. Social workers should have their workload reduced, enabling them to provide more therapeutic services to foster children, biological parents and foster families in the foster care process; government should support welfare organizations financially, increasing the probability of welfare organizations to employ more social workers, and thereby increasing the number of social workers rendering reconstruction services; social workers should through cooperation with other welfare organizations deliver foster care services to increase resources such as knowledge and skills to assist foster children and their biological parents in their reunification.

The recommendations were aimed at services relating to assessment, prevention and intervention with this vulnerable and marginalized group. The recommendations also included that future research be done in order to focus on the specific reconstruction services that could increase the probability of foster children returning to their biological parents. This may decrease the large number of foster children currently staying in foster care for longer than the restricted period of two years.

## OPSOMMING

'n Kombinasie van 'n verkennende en beskrywende studie, tesame met 'n benadering wat beginsels van sowel die kwantitatiewe as oor die kwalitatiewe benadering insluit was gekies in 'n poging om kennis en insig te verkry van die rol van die maatskaplike werker in die hereniging van pleegkinders met hul biologiese ouers. Die motivering vir hierdie studie het na vore gekom na bewuswording van 'n leemte in Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur oor die rol van die maatskaplike werker in die hereniging van pleegkinders met hul biologiese ouers, insluitende 'n leemte aan toeganklike inligting aangaande maatskaplike werkers se gebruik van rekonstruksie dienslewering in die hereniging van pleegkinders met hul biologiese ouers. Die navorser het van hierdie leemte in die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur ten opsigte van familiehereniging dienslewering en die lewering van programme bewus geword tydens 'n voorondersoek van die Nexus- databasis (1999). Die doel van die studie was dus om inligting in te samel om 'n beter begrip te ontwikkel van maatskaplike werkers se lewering van rekonstruksie dienste wanneer pleegkinders met hul biologiese ouers herenig word in terme van die Kinderwet, Wet 74 van 1983.

Die literatuurstudie het eerstens gefokus op die proses en prosedure van statutêre verwydering van kinders binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks van die Kinderwet nr 74 van 1983. Statutêre verwydering is ondersoek om 'n beter begrip te ontwikkel van die omstandighede waar statutare verwydering toelaatbaar is met verwysing na die Kinderwet, Wet 74 van 1983. Die literatuurstudie het ook die rol van die maatskaplike werkers in pleegsorg en rekonstruksie dienslewering ingesluit om 'n beter begrip te verkry van die omstandighede waarin maatskaplike werkers besluite moet neem tydens die plasing van kinders in pleegsorg. Die literatuurstudie het ook gefokus op die rol van maatskaplike werkers tydens pleegsorg en rekonstruksie dienslewering ten einde 'n beter begrip te ontwikkel van die dienste wat maatskaplike werkers bied aan pleegouers, biologiese ouers en pleegkinders tydens pleegsorg.

Die literatuurstudie het ook die rol van die maatskaplike werker in die lewering van pleegsorg en rekonstruksie dienslewering vanuit 'n maatskaplike ontwikkeling en sterkte perspektief verken ten einde 'n beter begrip te ontwikkel van die beginsels vir intervensie soos bepaal in die Witskrif vir Welsyn (Departement van Welsyn en Bevolkings ontwikkeling, 1997) en die Geïntegreerde Diensleweringmodel (2004). Daar is besluit om 21 maatskaplike werkers wat rekonstruksie dienste tydens pleegsorg lewer aan sowel kinders as hul ouers wat van die Strand, Stellenbosch, Somerset-Wes, Kuilsrivier en die Departement van Maatskaplike Dienste in die Paarl afkomstig is, by die studie te betrek.

Die resultate van hierdie ondersoek het tot 'n groot mate die bevindinge van die literatuurstudie bevestig, naamlik dat 'n hoë persentasie van kinders verwyder word van hulle ouers se sorg. Hierdie biologiese kinders benodig rekonstruksie dienste gelewer deur maatskaplike werkers werksaam in kinder-en gesinsorgorganisasies in Suid-Afrika. Maatskaplike werkers tans werksaam in Suid-Afrika het egter nie genoeg hulpbronne, tyd of die voldoende aantal maatskaplike werkers om effektiewe rekonstruksie dienste te lewer in 'n poging om die terugkeer van kinders na hul biologiese ouers vol te hou en aan te moedig nie.

Die resultate van die studie het dus 'n aanduiding gegee van maatskaplike werkers se vermoë om rekonstruksie dienste vir pleegkinders en hul biologiese ouers te lewer: maatskaplike werkers se werklading moet verlig word om hulle in staat te stel om meer terapeutiese dienste te lewer in pleegsorg; die regering behoort maatskaplike werkorganisasies finansieel te ondersteun, wat die waarskynlikheid van welsynsorganisasies om meer maatskaplike werkers in diens te neem verhoog, en dus tot 'n toename sal lei in die persentasie van maatskaplike werkers wat rekonstruksie dienste lewer; maatskaplike werkers behoort deur samewerking met ander welsynsorganisasies die beskikbaarheid en effektiwiteit van hulpbronne soos kennis en vaardighede tydens rekonstruksie-dienslewering aan kinders in pleegsorg en hul biologiese ouers te verhoog en te verbeter, wat tegerlykertyd die herenigingsproses sal bevorder.

Die aanbevelings het gefokus op dienste wat verband hou met assessering, voorkoming en intervensie met hierdie kwesbare kinders in pleegsorg en hul biologiese ouers. Die aanbevelings sluit in dat vêrdere navorsing gedoen word ten einde die fokus te plaas op spesifieke rekonstruksie- dienste wat die waarskynlikheid van pleegkinders se terugkeer na hul ouers sal verhoog. Dit hou die moontlikheid in dat die hoë persentasie pleegkinders wat vir langer as die beperkte tydperk van twee jaar in pleegsorg bly, verlaag sal word.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

The family unit is responsible for the welfare and security of all its members (Lerwick, 2002:9). The nuclear family fulfils an important role in the balanced development of children, providing the ideal environment for raising children (Kruger, 1996:10). There are certain circumstances, according to Article 14(4) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, which substantiate the statutory removal of children from their biological parents. According to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 children need to be removed from situations where they are either physically or emotionally abused and/or neglected. Children without parents or guardians as well as children with parents or guardians who cannot be traced are also in need of removal according to the Act. In cases of child abuse and neglect, foster parents are the children's custodians, where foster children are legally placed in substitute care until the circumstances that led to the removal of the children are resolved.

Foster care is defined by the Amendment Act Child Care Amendment Act, 1996. No.96 of 1996 as "the placement of children by means of an order of the children's court, in the custody of a suitable family or individual, willing to act as foster parents to the children". Moaisi (2003:2) cites Herbst and Miller (2001:1) defining foster care as time limited, planned statutory substitute care for children who cannot be cared for by their own parents. The children are generally financially maintained by the aid of a foster care grant paid by the government, with a corresponding duty on the part of the biological parents to contribute towards the children's maintenance.

The Government Gazette (2006:106) states that placing children in foster care is only allowed for a restricted period, to allow time for reconstruction services to the children and their biological parents by the social worker. The order of the children's court states that the order will lapse in two years from the date the order was made.

According to Moaisi (2003:20) many children in South Africa stay in foster care until they are eighteen years and/or have completed secondary school, therefore staying in foster care for longer than the restricted time of two years.

In South Africa 140 951 children are currently in foster care, needing reconstruction services. According to the South African National Council for Child Welfare (2001), the number of children defined by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (as amended in Act 96 of 1996) as children in need of care, increases by more than 21 per cent per year (Moaisi, 2003:1). In countries such as Sweden the increase in the number of children in foster care is a growing concern. Westermarck (2006:2) states that during the 1980s the number of children placed outside their parental homes in Sweden was stable; however, during the 1990s there was a considerable increase in the number of children being cared for outside their parental home due to these children's severe behavioural and emotional problems. In view of the high number of children removed from parental care (the biological parent) and needing reconstruction services, the latter clearly form a very important part of services in child welfare in South Africa, where social workers become the catalyst to render the reconstruction services to both foster children and their parents (Eloff, 1987:1).

The government and welfare agencies in the NGO sector are the agents, where social workers are the facilitators, delivering reconstruction services to enhance the prompt return of children to their families.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 affirms that another imperative aspect of reconstruction entails social workers assessing the current situation in the family home immediately after the statutory removal of children from parental care, and the formulation of a case plan (Swann, 2006:2). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 implemented in America required child welfare agencies to assist in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents.

As stated by Streak (2005:27) the Service Delivery Policy for Foster Care (2004) further advocates the importance of a case plan where the projected reconstruction services need to include assessment and the delivery of appropriate programmes.

As indicated by Berdie (2003:325) the Child Care Act of 1983 requires that social workers provide foster children with a written case plan, where reconstruction services to foster children and parents are predetermined. The purpose of the case plan is to ensure that the reunification of parents and children is encouraged, visitation is arranged and children are located in the same geographical area as the parents.

The focal point of reconstructive services is to facilitate continuous contact between parents and their children, while helping parents develop their proficiency in parenting and implementing coping mechanisms to avoid integration and adaptation problems with the return of the children. According to Reich (2007:16) the Adoption and Assistance Child Welfare Act of 1980 implemented in America attempts to safeguard children's connectedness to their biological families through reconstruction services, preventing long stays in foster care where reconstruction services receive precedence. Reconstruction services to foster children and biological parents are continued during foster care in order to resolve the problems that led to the placement, with the intent of returning children to the care of their parents (Lerwick, 2002:20). According to the Child Care Act of 1993 it is the responsibility of the social worker to establish the probability of reunification of children with their parents in determining whether the parents are capable of being reunited with their children or not (Humphrey, 2006:2).

According to Lerwick (2002:21) the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), the legislation by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for vulnerable youth (1996) and the National Plan of Action (1995) for children are documents currently identifying which reconstruction services need to be delivered to families and children with the aim of ensuring reunification.

According to the National Plan of Action (NPA) for children in South Africa, the implementation of parental programmes is vital to enhance family functioning and the return of children to their families. The delivery of these reconstruction services is paramount in helping families understand the dynamics of their situation, as well as their problems and strengths (Neilson, 1997:5-8).

In the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), developmental social welfare refers to the “integrated and comprehensive system of social services, facilities and programmes to promote social development and the social functioning of people, where poverty alleviation is very important”. The vision is for social workers to provide rehabilitative, developmental and protective services through their programmes in welfare agencies. Social workers need to move away from rescuing families to empowering families, focusing on giving the family new knowledge and skills to adjust and improve their social functioning and by focusing on the strengths of the family. The strengths perspective rests on the observation that it is easier to assist a client achieve positive change by focusing on and building on the client’s strengths rather than focusing on client’s problems or shortcomings (Saleeby, 2002:1). The strengths perspective provides the framework for the social worker to be aware of client strengths during assessment and intervention (Sheaffor, Horejsi, & Horejsi, 2000:93).

Although the welfare department and welfare agencies in the NGO sector lay emphasis on the use of the developmental and strengths perspectives as set out in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and Service Delivery Model (2004) during reconstruction services to foster children and their families, it is not clear how the welfare department implements and apply these services in practice. According to Freundlich and Avery (2005:115-134) the reality in South Africa is that the social workers remove children from their parents but do not have the resources or sufficient numbers to deliver reconstruction services to sustain the children’s return.

According to Lerwick (2002:23) social workers have very high caseloads which inhibit them from rendering effective and intense reconstruction services. High caseloads are the primary factor impeding the delivery of reconstruction services in South Africa. According to Kleijn (2004:26) social workers’ inability to render effective reconstruction services is blamed on the insufficient numbers of social workers currently delivering reconstruction services.



Whether considered nationally, at the provincial level, or in local programmes, between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of children placed out of their homes will return to their homes.

To promote successful and enduring reunification, stronger efforts should be made to strengthen families whilst children are placed in foster care, providing sufficient reconstructive services to allow children and biological parents to reunite as soon as possible.

Another factor inhibiting the reunification of foster children with their biological parents could be the high unemployment ratio in South Africa. Parents find it very hard to adjust to being capable parents (St. Anne's Homes Services, 2003:1). According to Moaisi (2003:3) it has been estimated that the government spends millions of rands a year on foster care grants, with R570 per foster child being granted since April 2003. With the return of children to their parents, the financial expenditure of the government concerning foster care grants will decrease, providing more funds to alleviate poverty. According to Walton (1993:474) the government prefers and encourages social workers to reunify parents with children due to the alarming costs of foster care to the state, and the difficulty in finding suitable adoptive parents.

Following a search done on the Nexus Data Base (1999) the following three studies were identified: an assessment of orphan reunification (Malekele, 1999), child reunification in children's homes (Lerwick, 2003), and a study of the experiences of kinship foster care (Van Rensburg, 2006). This clearly shows that these studies were emphasizing reunification of orphan children and biological parents, and reunification from the perspective of children in a children's home.

There is thus no focus on the role of the social worker in reconstruction services contributing to the reunification of foster children with biological parents, clearly showing a dearth of research into the role of the social worker in reconstruction services.

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Literature (Moaisi, 2003:2; Kernan, 2004:1) confirms that foster care in most cases becomes the permanent solution for foster children and biological parents, while diminishing the likelihood of a feasible reunification. Social workers remove children from their parents, but do not have the resources to deliver reconstruction services to sustain the children's return. The fragmented delivery of reconstruction services due to the lack of cooperation between organizations further leads to ineffective reconstruction. According to the Government Gazette Children's Act nr 38 of 2005 the social worker is expected to provide professional counselling, and implement problem-solving solutions during reconstruction services between the parent and children with the aim of reunification.

This study aims to investigate the notion that foster children spend two and more years in the child welfare system, staying longer than the restricted time of two years in foster care. As Streak (2005:43) points out, there is an increasing awareness of the lack of accessible information about social workers' use of reconstruction services in the reunification of foster children and biological parents in South Africa.

The research question underpinning the central focus of the study is as follows: What kind of reconstruction services do social workers utilize to contribute to the reunification of foster children with their biological parents?

## 1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The **aim** of the research is to gain a better understanding of how social workers render reconstruction services to contribute to the reunification process of foster care children with their biological parents, in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

The following **objectives** have been formulated to achieve this aim:

- To explain the process and procedures of statutory removal of children within the South African context, in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
- To describe the role of the social worker in foster care and reconstruction.

- To explain how foster care and reconstruction services could be rendered according to the social development and strengths perspective.
- To explore the nature of reconstruction services and programmes social workers utilize to reunite foster children with their biological parents.

## **1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

For the purpose of the study, both a literature and empirical study will be undertaken.

### **1.4.1 Literature study**

A review of existing literature on the subject, such as studies and research reports guides the researcher towards undertaking an original path in the research process, in addition to being provided with guidelines during the research (Anderson, 2002:31).

Through the use of a literature review, the researcher was able to critique previous research relating to the general question selected and was provided with new insights to the current study (Fouché & Delport cited in De Vos, 2005:84). South African and international literature was reviewed from a social work perspective.

Articles from the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child and Acts from the Government Gazette provided information on the role of the social worker in the reunification process of children and their parents and the responsibilities and rights of both children and their parents.

The library catalogue and books at the J.S. Gericke Library and Erica Theron Reading Room of the Department of Social Work of Stellenbosch University were consulted during the research process.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the aim and objectives of the study the research will be done using a combination of an exploratory and a descriptive study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2002:79) an exploratory study is usually done when there is little knowledge and understanding concerning the research question.

The exploratory research is appropriate since the researcher is interested in the subject being researched, and has a need to improve understanding and knowledge of the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. According to Babbie and Mouton (2002:81) a descriptive study is undertaken to describe situations.

The researcher will first observe and then describe what was observed. Through the descriptive study the role of the social worker in reconstruction services to foster children and their parents will be described. A mixed methodology containing fundamentals of both the quantitative and qualitative approach will be used (De Vos et al., 2005:359).

### **1.5.1 Data collection**

Quantitative research will be used by implementing a measuring instrument such as an appropriate questionnaire, to obtain facts and opinions about the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their parents. According to Delport, cited in De Vos et al. (2005:168) this type of data-collection method can be categorized into questionnaires, checklists, indexes and scales. For the purpose of this study a questionnaire (Annexure A) will be used. The general purpose of a questionnaire is to obtain facts and opinions about a occurrence from people who are knowledgeable on the specific matter. According to Babbie and Mouton (2002:289) the use of a semi-structured questionnaire is efficient where both open and closed questions are used to gather data. For the purpose of this study the researcher will use a self-administered questionnaire where the questionnaires are handed to the respondents to complete on their own. The researcher is available in case problems are experienced.

In qualitative research the goal is to describe and understand, rather than to give an explanation and prediction of human behaviour. The researcher is interested in the subjective examination of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to an outsider perspective. In view of the abovementioned description of a qualitative approach to research, the researcher concluded that this approach was well suited for

realizing the goal of this study where the emphasis is placed on describing the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents.

## **1.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

According to Powers (1985) cited in De Vos et al. (2005:193) a population is a “set of entities in which all the measurements of interest to the practitioner or researcher are presented”. The population refers to all the social work NGOs in the Western Cape where social workers play a role in reconstruction services with both children and parents.

Although all social work NGOs possess those characteristics, it is not feasible to involve them all because of the time and cost consideration. This will allow the researcher to obtain data from a sample, a subset of the study population.

A non-probability sample using availability sampling will be used to select the sample. Grawetter and Forzanot (2003) are cited in De Vos et al. (2005:201) stating that in a “non-probability sampling the odds of selecting a particular individual are not known, because the researcher does not know the population size or the members of the population”. According to Alston and Bowles (2003:88) availability sampling gives the social worker the chance to use a sample which is convenient or available. For the purpose of the study the specific organizations were selected because they were a convenient group. The organizations are all situated within close proximity of the University of Stellenbosch where the researcher would be conducting the research. Therefore the decision to choose Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) rendering child and family welfare services in the Strand, Stellenbosch, Somerset-West, Kuils River and the Department of Social Services in Paarl was appropriate and convenient because of their close proximity to Stellenbosch University.

The sample according to Strydom cited in De Vos et al. (2005:194) results in more accurate information than might have been acquired had one studied the whole population. Therefore twenty social workers from the areas mentioned above, will be interviewed.

According to Singleton (1998) cited in De Vos (2005:202) this type of sample is based entirely on the decision of the researcher in that a sample is composed of elements containing the most “representative or typical attributes of the population”. According to Alston and Bowles (2003:87-88) the number of subjects was determined by access and availability. In the abovementioned organizations all the social workers available and facilitating reconstruction services were used in the study totalling 24 social workers.

The availability sample would thus provide valuable insights into the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents.

## **1.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Mainly quantitative research will be employed, where the content of captured data will be analyzed. According to De Vos (2005:218) it is difficult if not impossible to explain raw data, therefore the researcher will describe and analyze the data and then interpret the results of the findings. Analysis means the classifying and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions.

The rationale of analysis is to reduce data to an understandable and interpretable form so that the different research problems can be studied, and assumptions be made. Statistics are often used not only to explain the distinctiveness of a sample group, but also to check for comparisons or differentiations between groupings. The researcher will thus use quantitative research to learn more about the population from which the samples were drawn, using the Microsoft Excel programme to analyze and give information statistically by using tables and graphs.

For the purpose of the study qualitative data analysis will be employed where it is about interpretation rather than mathematics. According to Alston and Bowles (2003:206-207) data are analyzed using logic, theoretical and methodological principles rather than applying statistical formulae or quantification. Qualitative data analysis is appropriate for the study in that the meaning that the social workers ascribe to their experiences regarding reconstruction services in foster care, captures the richness and complexity of their lived experiences. Qualitative data analysis consists of three general stages which follow one another in a continuous sequence. The first stage is data reduction. Data are

coded, summarized and classified in order to identify important elements of the problem being researched. The important objective of data reduction is to identify the central topics emerging from the research by classifying the information as it is gathered.

The second stage of qualitative data analysis is data organization. Information is accumulated around certain themes and points and results are usually presented in text.

The third phase is interpretation where tendencies, trends and explanations are identified which lead to assumptions which can be tested by more data gathering, categorizing and interpretation. Through the qualitative data analysis it is possible to obtain assumptions from the different opinions of the respondents regarding reconstruction services in foster care.

According to Alston and Bowles (2003:205) there are four differences between quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative analysis uses statistics whereas qualitative data analysis uses interpretation and logic. When analyzing quantitative data there are standardized procedures and rules, whereas qualitative analysis only have guidelines. The third difference concerns the collection of data. Quantitative analysis occurs only after data collection is finished and qualitative data analysis occurs concurrently with data collection. The fourth difference refers to quantitative analysis determining in advance which methods will be used as part of the study design whereas in qualitative analysis methods may differ depending on the circumstance.

There are thus distinct differences between quantitative and qualitative data analysis which are important to remember when the data are analyzed.

## **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is limited because of the lack of South African literature about family reunification services and programmes delivered. Most literature is from First World countries like Sweden, America and England which differ radically from South Africa. Another limitation is the 1983 Child Care Act which is in the process of being replaced by the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005. According to Jamieson and Proudlock (2005:

[http:// www.childline.org.za/WhatsNewChildrensBillProgress.htm](http://www.childline.org.za/WhatsNewChildrensBillProgress.htm)) the Child Care Act 73 of 1983 was not written from a child rights perspective and needed alterations to emphasize children's rights. The new Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 however is aimed at giving rights to children and will emphasize the principle of the best interests of children.

These changes thus needed to be implemented in the research to make sure that current legislation is adhered to regarding the new Child Care Act 2005 (Act 38 of 2005).

## **1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

According to Strydom, cited in De Vos et al. (2005:69) possible ethical issues refer to the prospective respondents giving informed consent, where the respondents should not be deceived in any way. The consent of the participants should be voluntary, without any implied consequence for refusal to take part and with regard for participants' privacy and dignity. The researcher asked the management of the previously mentioned NGOs consent concerning the involvement of social workers to give possible participants the choice to participate or not. An example of the consent form (Annexure B) will be attached. All information obtained about participants should be treated confidentially. According to Alston and Bowles (2003:21) confidentiality means that the information should not be revealed to others, except in reporting research results as agreed, and also that the information will not be used for any purpose other than the research.

All the data gathered in the research process will be regarded as strictly confidential as stipulated in the questionnaire, thus adhering to the code of ethics where confidentiality is imperative.

## **1.10 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.10.1 Children in need of care**

According to the *New Dictionary for Social Work* (1995:9) children in need of care are those children whose social functioning, as well as physical, psychological and



emotional development is impeded by neglect or abuse, or lack of control by the parent or guardians.

### **1.10.2 Foster care**

According to the *New Dictionary for Social Work* (1995:49) 'foster care' is the statutory substitute care within the family circle for children who cannot be cared for by their parents in the short, medium or long term, while services are continued to the parents in order to return the children to their care within a specific period.

### **1.10.3 Family reunification (reconstruction services)**

According to the *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:56) 'reconstruction services' refer to child and family care aimed at the return of a family member who is in residential care of children in foster care.

Family reunification refers to reconstruction services rendered to the family with the intent to reunify children in foster care with their biological parents. According to Lerwick (2003:6) the National Legislation Framework for Families defines reconstructive services as any services rendered with the intent of returning children in foster care to their parents. For the purpose of the study the term defined as family reunification will refer to the social work delivery of services with the objective to reunite children with their parents.

### **1.10.4 Foster parent**

According to the *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:49) a 'foster parent' refers to a person, other than a parent or guardian in whose care foster children are placed under the Child Care Act, 1983 (Act 51 of 1977).

According to the Amendment of the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 1) 'foster parent' means a person who has foster care of a child by order of the children's court, and includes an active member of an organization operating a cluster foster care scheme and who has been assigned responsibility for the foster care of a child.

### **1.10.5 Foster child**

According to the *New Dictionary for Social Work* (1995:26) a 'foster child' refers to a child who in accordance with legislation is placed in the care of a foster parent.

#### **1.10.6 Family**

According to the *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:26) the 'family' refers of the smallest social unit in society consisting of a man and his wife and child, a woman and her child or a man and his child, usually under one roof. 'Family' is persons related by blood or marriage.

#### **1.10.7 Child Care Act, 1983 (Act 51 of 1997)**

The Child Care Act (1983) provides for the establishment of children's courts and the appointment of commissioners of child welfare, for the protection and welfare of certain children and the adoption of children, for the establishment of certain institutions for the reception of children and for the treatment of children after such reception, and for contribution by the certain persons towards the maintenance of certain children, and to provide for incidental matters.

#### **1.10.8 Child Care Act (Act 83 of 2005)**

The Child Care Act of 2005 gives effect to certain rights of children as contained in the Constitution (1996), to set out principles relating to the care and protection of children, to define parental responsibilities and rights, to make further provision regarding children's courts, to provide for the issuing of contribution orders, to make new provision for the adoption of children, to provide for inter-country adoption and to give effect to the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption (1993).

The Child Care Act also prohibits child abduction and gives effect to the Hague Convention on Child Abduction (1980), as well as to provide for surrogate motherhood and to provide for matters connected therewith.

### **1.11 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH**

The research will be divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction to the study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the motivation for the importance of and the need for the study to be undertaken.

Chapter 1 also clearly indicates the research methodology to be undertaken during the research, explaining how the study will be done.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will present the literature review. Chapter 2 will deal with the process and procedures of statutory removal of children within the South African context of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and The Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005. Chapter 3 will describe the role of the social worker in foster care and reconstruction.

Chapter 4 will explain how foster care and reconstruction services should be rendered according to the social development and strengths perspectives.

In Chapter 5 and 6 the data of the empirical investigation will be depicted in order to relay the nature of the reconstruction services and programmes social workers utilize to reunite the foster children and biological parents.

Based on the findings of the empirical investigation, Chapter 7 will provide conclusions and recommendations for reconstruction services by social workers in the process of reunifying foster children with their biological parents.

The process and procedures of statutory removal of children in terms of the Child Care Act will be explained in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE PROCESS AND PROCEDURES OF STATUTORY REMOVAL OF CHILDREN IN TERMS OF THE CHILD CARE ACT**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In South Africa the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) provides for the strengthening of family life in all its varied forms, and recognizes the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of care, nurturance and socialization (Erasmus, 2006:2). It is thus generally presumed that the family is the primary caregiver responsible for the protection and welfare of all its members, as well as contributing to the well-being of society. The family offers predictability, organization and (preferably) safety to the social lives of its members. It is within families where children learn and develop skills that prepare them for life outside the family, first in school and later in the labour force (Collins & Jordan, 2006:11).

There are however certain circumstances which justify the removal of children from their families. These circumstances are identified in section 14(4) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 which states the need for the statutory removal of a minor child, identified as children under the age of 18. The Child Care Act of 2005 (Act 38 of 2005) explains the age of adulthood, whereby the Age of Majority Act of 1972 specify the age of 21 as the age of majority, while a child was defined as someone under the age of 18. According to Govender and Masango (2007: <http://www.southafrica.info/publicservices/citizens/yourrights/childact-030707.htm>) currently any person under 18, unless married or emancipated by order of court, is a child and any person over 18 is an adult. According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 17) currently a child, whether male or female becomes a major upon reaching the age of 18 years. Grounds for the removal, as identified in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 refer to the "physical and emotional abuse and/or neglect of children, where these children are found in need of care and removed to substitute placements".

The Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 defines these children in need of care as "befits children and where appropriate, to safeguard and promote the well-being of children, protecting them from maltreatment, abuse, neglect, degradation, discrimination, exploitation and any other physical, emotional or moral harm or hazards". Social workers are the principal facilitators in the process of statutory removal, where their primary objective is to render services in aid of the best interests of these children (Collins & Jordan, 2006:12). For the purpose of the study the concept 'children' may also refer to a child.

Social workers are directed by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 in the delivery of the statutory removal process. Both the Child Care Act, 1983 (74 of 1983) and the Child Care Act, 2005 (38 of 2005) thus provide the legislative framework in South Africa for social workers removing children, containing numerous civil and criminal law provisions designed to protect children from ill-treatment or neglect. In particular, much of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 is concerned with supporting children who may be in need of substitute parental or alternative care for a short or longer term. The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 contains comprehensible regulations indicating the procedures and processes of the constitutional course of action to be taken when children are in need of care and destitute to be removed from their biological parents (Lerwick, 2002:22). According to the Child Care Act 38 2005 (section 156) if children have no parents or caregivers or have parents or caregivers who are unable or unsuitable to care for them, these children should be placed in foster care with foster parents or other appropriate forms of alternative care.

Statutory removal unfortunately has various negative effects on children. The social and psychological development of children is negatively influenced due to the separation from their biological parents. The long separation of children from their parents often have deep and more permanent consequences compared to those of the issues that led to the initial removal of the children from their families (Lerwick, 2002:9).

There should thus be a balance between the removal of children from their parents, the delivery of prevention and early intervention services where social workers attempt to avoid unnecessary removal, the implementation of statutory intervention and the

commencing of reunification services. The decision to remove children may evidently not be taken unconscientiously, or as the Department of Welfare (1998a:29) indicates, "...the natural bond between parent and child should only be disrupted in order to provide for the care and protection of the child where this would be in his or her best interests, otherwise it will be an immoral and improper exercise of the powers of the state..." (Lerwick, 2002:21). According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 152) "the best interests of children must be the determining factor in any decision whether children in need of care and protection should be removed and placed in temporary safe care".

The decision to remove children from the care of their biological parents remains the responsibility of the children's court of South Africa. The children's court have the duty of deciding whether any particular child needs to be removed from his/her parents through the statutory process and the courts is therefore directly tasked with implementing the constitutional right of every child to family or parental care, or to suitable substitute care when removed from the family environment because of abuse or neglect (The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 in Chapter 6, 2002).

This chapter will explain the importance of the process and procedures of statutory removal within a South African context where section 14(4) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and the Child Care Act 2005 (38 of 2005) stipulate the circumstances which justify the removal of children from their biological families.

Social workers are the primary facilitators in the process of statutory removal, assisting the court in the process of statutory removal. According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 if there are sufficient grounds for believing that children are in need of care and protection, the individual under whose protection the children are placed in temporary safe care or the provincial head of social development may refer those children to a social worker for investigation.

Statutory social work is defined by the *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:62) as "a specialized field in social work aimed at improving the social functioning of individuals,

families and communities by applying administrative procedures prescribed by a written law of a legislative body” (Lombard and Kleijn, 2006:217).

In the following section an overview of the statutory procedures will be explained where the goals as well as the process and specific phases of statutory removal will be discussed. This section will also discuss the process leading to the decision which children are in need of care, the approaches and principles in dealing with cases of children being abused and neglected and the assessment of abused children.

## **2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STATUTORY PROCESS**

In this section, statutory social work services will be discussed which will include an explanation and goals of the statutory removal process. The process of statutory removal will also be explained comprehensively, where the two phases of prevention and early intervention as well as statutory intervention will be discussed. In this discussion the criteria for finding children in need of care according to the Child Care Act of 1983 will be identified.

## **2.3 GOALS OF THE STATUTORY PROCESS**

The Child Care Act 73 of 1983 states that children are best cared for by their parents and should remain with their families, unless evidence contradicts this. Children should whenever possible be brought up within a dedicated family setting.

Where this is not possible, an environment similar to a family environment should be provided (South African Law Commission’s Review of the Child Care Act Report, 2002). Separation from parents should be a last resort. The focus should be on returning children to the family environment, where the first option is to place the children within their family, in the community of origin when possible, where the children are in no danger of possible abuse and/or neglect (Erasmus, 2006).

When families are unsuccessful in meeting the fundamental needs of every member of the family they need help, which often leads to the removal of children due to the inability of the parents to provide for the children’s physical and affective needs.

Physical care involves children's need for clothing, food, shelter, personal hygiene, safety and affective care referring to emotional aspects such as parents' ability to show love, listen and care for their children (Landman, 2005:28). When these needs are not met children would benefit from the statutory removal process, where they could receive the opportunity to be cared for by foster parents and receive the necessary physical and affective care.

The rationale for placing children in alternative care is the following (Kleijn, 2004:21):

- "To remove children from situations which could endanger them physically or psychologically.
- To provide healing from past, negative experiences such as abuse or neglect.
- To meet the children's emotional needs in agreement with their age.
- To provide for the children's care, education, and nurture whilst away from home.
- To help the children understand the family situation and the necessity of the placement.
- To prepare for the children's return to their family".

From this it seems that placing children in alternative care is to ensure children's safety, to remove them from situations which could endanger them physically or psychologically and provide for their emotional and educational needs in order to prepare them for the return to their family.

The goal of the Child Care Act 1983 is "that the family is the best place for children to develop; however, in cases of abuse and neglect intervention should be focused on the well-being of the children, be that by removing the children from their parental care, or by returning the children to their family". Kleijn (2004:22) argues that placing children in alternative care can be beneficial to the children when they are removed from possible psychological or physical harm.

When children cannot remain with their biological parents, even after the delivery of prevention and early intervention services, there is no other option but to remove the children and initiate the statutory removal process.



Statutory social services take place in accordance with existing legislation as identified in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005. These services are time-consuming and require supervision and intervention services.

According to Landman (2005:30) statutory social services include the following:

- "Removal of children in need of care takes place in agreement with existing legislation, which stipulates detailed administrative and legislative measures.
- Statutory social services are a time-consuming and constant process. The law permits a maximum time of six months in which a social work investigation is to take place and where adequate placement is sought for the children according to their specific requirements. After the maximum time of six months a court finalization date is set whereby the children are either found, as the law stipulates, to be at risk and then placed in alternative care or are found not to be at risk, in which case the children are returned to their parents.
- Continuous supervision and intensive therapeutic intervention take place, with the family and child in alternative placements. The court/magisterial order has to be renewed every two years".

Statutory social services are thus undertaken in agreement with specific legislative measures that has been put in place. In South Africa the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 are indicators of the appropriate guidelines social workers are required to follow during the statutory removal process.

Before children are removed there are however specific prevention and early intervention methods which need to be implemented in an attempt to avoid the statutory removal of children from their families. These services will be discussed according to the statutory process.

## **2.4 THE PHASES OF THE STATUTORY PROCESS**

The statutory process entails the delivery of prevention and early intervention as well as statutory intervention services. Child protection services during phase one of the statutory process include the actions taken by various role players to prevent and

intervene in child abuse and neglect. Social workers assist the children's court in the specific activities involving planning, reporting, assessing, monitoring, managing, investing and treating, relevant court activities and the support of children and their families (September, 2006:54). Before the child can be removed social workers render prevention and early intervention services with the aim of helping the children and their family to resolve the problems that led to the initial investigation of child abuse and neglect in the beginning. The two phases include prevention and early intervention services and the statutory intervention process which will be discussed to explain the social worker's role in preventing statutory removal as well as the social worker's involvement in statutory intervention where children are removed from situations where their safety is threatened.

#### **2.4.1 Prevention and early intervention services**

The first phase in the statutory process is that social workers should, according to Regulations 2(4)(b) of the current Child Care Act 74 of 1983, as amended by the 1998 amendment act (Notice 6133 of 1998), "present a summary of prevention and early intervention services that were to be delivered in respect of the children and their families".

This summary of services is presented in a written report which is necessary to inform the court of the predetermined prevention and early intervention services the social worker will aim to deliver in assisting the children and biological parents to resolve the problems that could lead to possible removal. Prevention and early intervention services as stipulated in the report presented to the children's court should occur prior to the initiation of the statutory process.

Numerous writers encourage this and indicate that only once such services have been found unsuccessful should statutory intervention be implemented to remove the children from their parents (Kleijn, 2004:22-23).

Prevention and early intervention services to assist families in addressing their problems and preventing statutory removal are thus imperative to prevent statutory removal. According to the Government Gazette (1999) prevention is defined in the

Welfare Financing Policy (1999) as “any strategies and programmes which strengthen and build the capacity and self-reliance of families, children, youth, women and older persons’. The “2002 Children’s Bill, in clause 158(2(b) defines prevention services as “social work services provided to families with children in order to strengthen and build their capacity and self-reliance to address problems that may or are bound to occur in the family environment and which, if unhindered may lead to statutory intervention”. According to Kleijn (2004:22) the “Department of Welfare (1998a:3) states that prevention services foster healthy relationships between parents and children where there is a strong prominence in helping children and biological parents address their difficulties, before the problem is too complex to resolve”. Prevention services are thus a form of intervention with the aim of preventing children from being removed from their families.

Prevention services are aimed at three levels, namely the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Primary prevention services is directed at the general population with the goal of preventing the occurrence of maltreatment and/abuse of children.

Secondary prevention or early intervention services focuses efforts on families where there are children known to be at risk of maltreatment, in order to prevent ongoing abuse. According to Kleijn (2004:46) many families do not receive prevention services due to the lack of time of social workers..

In many cases the social worker needs to remove children without a warrant due to the urgency of the case, leaving no time for prevention services. Due to heavy caseloads the social worker only has time to deal with the crisis and does not have enough time to prevent statutory removal.

Heavy caseloads further prevent social workers from delivering intensive early intervention and prevention services where the social worker has the time to assess clients’ development and education needs, provide support and empower clients during prevention and early intervention services. According to Kleijn (2004:93) the government should provide more resources and funding to improve prevention and

early intervention services for keeping children with their parents, thus preventing removal rather than maintaining alternative placements such as foster care.

The emphasis of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 is however on tertiary prevention where abuse is addressed once it has occurred, and services are rendered in order to prevent its continuation. The remainder of the statutory process is at the tertiary level of prevention where social workers need to react to existing problems and protect children from maltreatment once it has already occurred (Kleijn, 2004:23).

When the delivery of prevention services is unsuccessful it is necessary to implement early intervention services. Early intervention services are defined in the Financing Policy (1999) as services that “target children, youth, families, women, older persons and communities identified as being vulnerable or at risk and ensure through strengths-based development and therapy programmes that they do not have to experience statutory removal of any kind” (Children’s Bill, 2002).

Early intervention services are defined in the 2002 Children’s Bill, in clause 158(1)(b) as “social worker services provided to families where children are identified of being at risk of harm or removal into alternative care”. Intervention services are thus delivered in order to avoid statutory removal.

These early intervention services according to the Department of Welfare (1998a:4) should consist of the assessment of children’s developmental needs, educational progression, support and empowerment (2002:[http:// www.doj.gov.za/reports/child-care.html](http://www.doj.gov.za/reports/child-care.html)). Early intervention aims to prevent the removal of children, and avoid the reoccurrence of problems and redirecting children away from either the child or youth care justice system in an attempt to help children and their families resolve their problems.

During early intervention (non-statutory services) those identified as being vulnerable are assisted before the required statutory services, more serious intervention or placement in alternative care is needed (2006:[http www.welfare.gov.za.htm](http://www.welfare.gov.za.htm)).

According to the South African Law Commission's Review of the Child Care Act Report (2002) primary prevention and early intervention should seek to strengthen the functioning of the children and their families where parents' ability to care for their children is improved. When intervention methods however make no impact on the children and their biological parents, the next step is to implement the statutory intervention process through the facilitation of social workers. When children are in serious danger of being abused or neglected, it is best to remove and place them in alternative care. It is of paramount importance to remove children as soon as possible when prevention or early intervention services do not improve the parent's ability to provide a safe, healthy and balanced environment for their children. The statutory intervention process will be discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4.2 The statutory intervention process**

The second phase in the statutory process is social workers' removal of children from their family home. The presence of serious safety concerns require child protection services to remove children from their family home to a protective placement (shelter, family foster homes, or group homes) where the children are in no danger of being abused and/or neglected. Divorce and criminal courts are also allowed to refer children to a place of safety, thereby initiating a children's court inquiry.

According to "The Unique Behavioural Health Service Needs of Children, Youth, and Families" (2006: [http:// www.azdhs.gov/bhs/guidance/unique/cps/pdf](http://www.azdhs.gov/bhs/guidance/unique/cps/pdf)) the presence of serious safety concerns leads to the statutory intervention process where social workers intercede and remove children because of unsuccessful early intervention and prevention methods to resolve the crisis situation that led to the preliminary admittance.

The statutory intervention process is initiated when prevention and early intervention have failed, or where there is a calamity which cannot be resolved without the facilitation of a social worker. (Department of Welfare, 1998a:4). These crisis situations are usually reported in one of the following two ways:

- “Requests by the family themselves, for example the mother, father or siblings, or by community organizations and professionals, such as teachers, doctors and social workers.
- Reports on child abuse and neglect by the public sector”.

Social workers have a duty to attend to all these requests and reports received without delay. An immediate investigation into the suspected maltreatment of children should be administered by the social worker to confirm the assessment of both resilient and risk factors relating to the maltreatment of the children.

The social worker should then compile and present a report identifying the circumstances of the removal of the child to the court (The Unique Behavioural Health Service Needs of Children, Youth, and Families, 2006).

The statutory process is usually initiated in various ways. The following three options are identified by the Department of Welfare (1998a:36):

- “Initiation of an inquiry with no immediate removal.
- Immediate removal of children with a search warrant.
- Immediate removal of children without a search warrant”.

The Department of Welfare (1998a:29) recommends the first option, where an inquiry is first made into the possibility of abuse or neglect, with no immediate removal of the children. Social workers initiate an investigation and complete the entire investigation while the children remain at home. The children may then, if the children’s court finds the children in need of care, immediately be removed to alternative care.

According to the Children’s Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 151) option two involves “children being removed to temporary safe care by a court order. The presiding officer must order that the question of whether the children are in need of care and protection, be referred to a designated social worker for investigation to be contemplated in terms of section 155 (2). The social worker authorized by the court order may then either alone or accompanied by a police officer enter any premises mentioned in the court order and remove the children from the premises. The search warrant issued by the

court thus allows the social worker to remove the children to a temporary place of safety”.

The officer can however order in terms of subsection (1) that the children immediately be placed in temporary safe care should it be necessary for the safety and well-being of the children. This is option three, where the social worker removes the children without a search warrant. In many instances children are in need of immediate protection. After the removal social workers need to obtain a warrant from the commissioner, based on the information of any responsible person, presented under oath.

In the event of emergency cases social workers can remove children without a warrant, taking into consideration the two rules in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 as amended, namely that there should be reason to believe that the child is indeed a child as referred to in section 14 (4), which stipulates the criteria for children in need of care and that an impediment in obtaining a warrant would be detrimental to the safety and welfare of the children.

According to the Children’s Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 a “designated social worker may remove children without a court order if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the children need instantaneous emergency protection and that the removal of the children from their home environment is the best way of securing their safety and well-being”.

Once the social worker has removed the children and placed them in temporary safe care the social worker must where traceable, within 24 hours inform the parent, guardian or care-giver of their removal.

The social worker must no later than the next court day notify the clerk of the children’s court and the provincial department of social development of the children’s removal (The Children’s Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005).

Decisions to undertake temporary safe care removal without prior court authorization will often need to be taken quickly in situations where an apparently extreme crisis makes it difficult to properly weigh up all appropriate aspects in a relaxed manner.

However, where a designated social worker's actions do not subsequently measure up to the impartial test, removal will be considered illegal.

The person undertaking the removal might face criminal charges based upon the inappropriate use of force/damage to property or face claims brought to the attention of the police official by aggrieved family members.

In section 152(5) – (7) of the Child Care Act the government has added considerably to the probable sanctions by explicitly listing the exploitation of emergency removal powers as justification for disciplinary procedures, finding of unethical demeanor and in the case of NGO social workers removal of their license to carry out care and protection services (Family Law Course in the Faculty of Law University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2007). According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 152)" misuse of a power referred to in subsection (1) by a designated social worker employed in terms of the Public Service Act or the Municipal Systems Act represents unprofessional or inappropriate behaviour as is stipulated in section 27 (1) (b) of the Social Service Professions Act, 1978 (Act 110 of 1978) by that social worker".

The statutory process is thus initiated using an inquiry with no immediate removal, immediate removal with a search warrant or immediate removal without a search warrant. It is of paramount importance to remove children when abuse or neglect is perceived, but the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 prevents social workers from misusing their power to remove children and they face disciplinary steps in such circumstances.

After the statutory social services process has been initiated the children's court inquiry is the following step in the statutory removal process. The criminal court inquiry is imperative for the possible cases of abuse or neglect to be meticulously examined through the commissioner of the court.

This is a very important stage in the statutory removal process, where social workers present all the information gathered during the investigation in an attempt to convince the commissioner of the court of the importance to remove the children from the situation of abuse or neglect. The opening of a children's court inquiry will be discussed in detail in the following section.



### **2.4.3 Opening of a children's court inquiry**

Once statutory procedures commence a case needs to be brought before the children's court commissioner for analysis, known as a children's court inquiry (Department of Welfare, 1998a:39). During the court hearing the commissioner reviews the removal initiatives while the parent, children or social worker may submit further information to the commissioner to assist in the evaluation process (Department of Welfare, 1998a:39). The social worker plays a fundamental role in the delivery of concrete evidence during court procedures through the written report as well as the vocal testimonial he or she delivers (Freundlich & Avery, 2005:115-134).

Based on the documents and information received the commissioner must decide whether there is sufficient reason for the children's court inquiry to proceed or if the case must be set aside.

According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 50) if it appears to any court that children are in need of care and protection as is stipulated in section 150, the court must assign a social worker the task of investigating whether the child is in need of care as set out in section 155(2). In the event of the case proceeding, the social worker will need to conduct an intense investigation regarding all the aspects concerning the children and parent's functioning.

The social worker may enter any premises mentioned in the court order and either remove the children in terms of sections 47 and 151, investigate the circumstances of the children, record any information and carry out any specific instruction of the court. The investigation's primary objective is to assess the circumstances of the "children, the parents or parents of the children, a person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the children, a care-giver of the children, the person under whose control the children are or any other relevant person" (The Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 51)).

After the investigation the social worker needs to complete a report for the children's court, providing information enabling the court to determine whether the children are in need of care, and provide suggestions regarding the kind of care suitable for the

children. On completion of the investigation, the court will assemble yet again for the finalization of the inquiry (Department of Welfare, 1998a:41). The Department of Welfare (1998a:41) emphasizes that the finalization of the report must take place as soon as possible after the opening of the inquiry, serving the best interests of the children who have been removed. According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 the written report must resemble an authoritative opinion in respect of the children's circumstances involved in a matter before a children's court. The written report must be put forward to the children's court within the prearranged period prior to the date of the hearing of the matter. The sooner the report is finalized, the sooner the children's needs can be determined, where children can then be removed from the environment where abuse and neglect might transpire and be placed in alternative care where their needs are met.

During the finalization process the social work report is regarded as fundamental evidence. Based on all the facts it can then be determined whether the children are in need of care or not.

The commissioner of the children's court often relies heavily on the pre-hearing report and evidence of the investigation of the social worker in determining whether the children are indeed in need of care.

If the child is found to be in need of care the commissioner has an obligation to issue an order regarding the placement of the children (Family Law Course in the Faculty of Law University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2007). The different options regarding the placement of the children will be discussed during the court inquiry. The different options in placing children will be discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4.4 Children's court decisions regarding the placement of the child**

The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 as amended by the Amendment Act Child Care Amendment Act, 1996. No.96 of 1996 96 of 1996, indicates in section 15(1) that the children's court may do one of the following:

- (a) “Order that children return/maintain in the custody of their parents, but that this must now be under the supervision of social workers and in terms of any other condition that the court might decide.
- (b) Order that the children must be placed in custody of suitable foster parents. In practice, the viability of the solution may depend on the availability of suitable foster parents.
- (c) Order the children to be sent to a children’s home designated by the director-general.
- (d) Order the children to be sent to an industrial school designated by the director-general. Children sent to industrial schools are particularly in need of discipline and control, which are provided by the larger institutions for example industrial schools run by the Department of Education” (Family Law Course in the Faculty of Law, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2007).

According to the Children’s Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 155) children should remain in temporary safe care at the place where the child is kept, relocated to another place in temporary safe care or be placed in temporary safe care. These alternative placements are made by the order of the children’s court; however, under the Child Care Act the maximum period of the children’s court order to remain in effect is two years (Child Care Act 74 of 1983, 2002).

Just prior to completion of the two years the social worker needs to once more submit a report regarding the circumstances of the children and their parents as well as the appropriateness to reunite the children with their biological parents and replace them in their custody.

Under the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 the Department of Social Development has complete power to decide whether to extend the order to provide alternative placement for the children beyond the period of the original court order. The court order is however terminated at the end of the two years, assuming that the children are returned home permanently. Failing this, the order has to be renewed. The original intent behind the limited time period is to pressure social workers and biological parents to engage in reconstruction work within a certain period.

The Department of Welfare (1998a:5) indicates that the children's return should be the preferred alternative. The children should not be withheld from their parents for longer than is absolutely necessary, but should be returned to their safeguarding as soon as possible. The best option seems to return the children to the biological parents because of the negative experiences that children experience when removed from their families. Children often experience a loss of security, loss of power in making decisions about their life, loss of parental love, loss of ownership in terms of their room/toys, the loss of family life in general and the loss of support systems referring to their friends in school, church and in the general community (Landman, 2005:30).

When children face abuse and neglect removal is crucial, but these children and their families need reunification services to help them resolve the issues that led to the removal in the first instance. Reunification services will be discussed briefly in the following section.

#### **2.4.5 Reunification services**

Once the children are in alternative care social workers should begin reunification services, where the focus is on the reunification of the children with their family (Kleijn, 2004:26).

In every case where children are placed in substitute care, the court will be supplied with a standard plan with the objective of achieving stability for the children, prioritizing family reunification and identifying specific time frames for the reunification between the children and their family (South African Law Commission's Review of the Child Care Act Report, 1998). According to the Child Care Act 83 of 2005 (section 157) the social worker facilitating the reunification of children and their parents must investigate the reasons why the children left their parental home, address those reasons and take action to prevent a recurrence.

Children and their families should receive reunification services immediately after their placement in alternative care, where the focus is on helping the children and their families adjust to the separation and arranging continuous contact between the children and their parents (Kleijn, 2004:24-25). According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of

2005 (section 157) children and their families should receive reunification services before and after reunification. Kleijn (2004:73) states that reunification services should include a documented plan stipulating the rendering of reunification services. Unfortunately the amount of administration and court appearances often prevent the social worker from adhering to the stipulated time frames as formulated in the plan. According to Puleng (2004:3) many children are placed in foster care with little planning for their future.

In some cases children can however not be returned to their parents due to the severity of abuse or the parent's inability to change their treatment of their children. It is then necessary for children to be placed in alternative permanent care, which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4.6 Alternative placements when reunification is not possible**

When the children cannot be reunited with their parents it is important that another form of suitable permanent care is provided (Department of Welfare, 1998a:22).

The alternative is to place the children in the care of other relatives (Department of Welfare, 1998a:25). If this is not possible the following permanent options are available:

- “Long- term foster care is often an appropriate option.
- Adoption is a suitable option where there is not a strong emotional bond between the children and their parents.
- Subsidized adoption is suitable when foster parents adopt foster children, but are dependent on the foster care grant in order to provide for their children.
- Long- term residential care is suitable for children who exhibit anti-social behaviour and require intensive treatment (Department of Welfare 1998a:25).
- Emancipation of children is another alternative, but is only possible if the children have already turned 18, and are able to take care of themselves”.

Stability should in all cases be attained preferably through returning children to their families, if not possible the abovementioned options should be considered (Kleijn

2004:27). The preferred option would be for the consistency provided by the family environment.

Before social workers can decide on the more permanent options, they have to be sure that the children will be best cared for in alternative placement and convinced that the parents do not have the ability to take care of their children.

There are very specific circumstances in place to help guide social workers in the identification of children in need of care outside their family home. The circumstances and criteria for identifying children in need of care will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.5 CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE**

In order for children to be removed through the statutory process they have to be declared in need of care (Department of Welfare, 1998a:29). This term is defined by the *New Dictionary of Social Work* (1995:9) as “children whose social functioning, as well as physical, psychological and emotional development is impeded by neglect or abuse, or lack of exercising control by the parent or guardian”.

In terms of the Amendment Act Child Care Amendment Act, 1996. No.96 of 1996 96 of 1996 the primary reason for removing children is that the children are in need of care, rather than the previous reason in the Amendment Act Child Care Amendment Act, 1996. No.96 of 1996 96 of 1996 which required that parents be found unsuitable to take care of their children. An amendment of section 14, shifted the care proceedings from a predominantly fault or parent-based approach to a predominantly children-centred approach. This dramatic shift is in line with section 28 (2) of the Constitution in terms of which children's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning them.

According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 7) the best interests of children need to be adhered to in several matters including “consideration of the nature of personal relationships with children and their parents, care-givers and relevant persons; attitude and capacity of parents to change; practical difficulty and expense of

children having contact with their parents; the need for the children to remain in the care of their parents, family and extended family; children's age, maturity, stage of development, gender, background and relevant character of the children; children's physical, emotional security and intellectual, emotional, social cultural development; the need for children to be brought up within a stable family or environment resembling as closely as possible a caring family environment; protecting children physically, psychologically and protecting children from family violence". According to the Amendment Act Child Care Amendment Act, 1996. No.96 of 1996 96 of 1996 it is more important to focus on the needs of the children than putting emphasis on the parents' inability to care for their children.

This approach empowers the children to voice their problems and allows social workers to address the root of the problem immediately. The circumstances indicating the need for removal will be discussed in the following section.

### **2.5.1 Circumstances where removal of children is justifiable**

Eloff (1987:31) refers to certain circumstances which justify the removal of children from their parents. These circumstances will be discussed in the following section:

- "Better alternatives are available and the damage of removal is likely to be outweighed by the harm of remaining at home.
- Severity of disorder in parent's behaviour or functioning.
- Severity of disorder in children's behaviour or functioning.
- Parental request for placement.
- Unwillingness or ambivalence regarding the care of children.
- Parent's refusal to utilize the services of the welfare organizations and the children's opposition to remain at, or return home"

Children should be removed in situations where both the children and their parent's behaviour or functioning is so severe that it is having a negative effect on their emotional and social well-being, where the option to remove the children from their family would be conducive to the positive development of both the children and their

parents. When parents are unwilling to cooperate with the social worker's attempts to change their behaviour it is an indication that it would be in the best interests of the children to remove them.

The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 as well as the Child Care Act 83 of 2005 however has specific criteria for finding children in need of care, These criteria will be identified in the following section. This legislation is essential in assisting social workers in South Africa with the removal of children.

### **2.5.2 Criteria for identifying children in need of care**

The current Child Care Act (Act 74 of 1983) as amended by Child Care Amendment Act (Act 96 of 1996) indicates in section 14(40) the following criteria to be considered referring to children in need of care:

- (a) "The children have no parents, children are under the age of 18.
- a(A) The children have parents or guardians who cannot be traced.
- a(B) The children:
  - (i) Have been abandoned or are without visible means of support.
  - (ii) Display behaviour which cannot be controlled by their parents or person in whose custody they are.
  - (iii) Live in circumstances likely to cause or conduce to their seduction, abduction or sexual exploitation.
  - (iv) Live in or are exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm their physical, mental or social well-being.
  - (v) Are in a state of physical or mental neglect.
  - (vi) Have been psychologically, emotionally or sexually abused or ill-treated by their parents, a guardian or the person in whose custody they are.
  - (vii) Or are being maintained in contravention of section 10 (that is the children are being illegally maintained apart from their parents "(Child Protection Services, 2007:1)."



According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 150) children are found in need of care and protection when "the children may be at risk if returned to the custody of the parents, guardians or care-givers, as there is reason to believe that they will live in or be exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm their physical, mental or social well-being". The Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 thus emphasizes the importance of avoiding recurrence of abuse and neglect where the social worker needs to ensure that reunification is appropriate and there are no risks of the children being further abused.

Except for the specific criteria for identifying children in need of care, there are also certain approaches and principles which social workers need to utilize in the process of child abuse and neglect. These approaches and principles will be explained in the following section.

### **2.5.3 Principles in dealing with the cases of abuse and neglect**

When children are identified in need of care there are certain approaches and principles that should be followed in dealing with the cases of abuse and neglect. It is imperative that practitioners address incidents and/or reports of child abuse and/or neglect as a priority as to ensure the protection of children and to serve their best interests at all given times.

Where there is a risk to the life of the children or likelihood of serious injury the state/welfare organizations need to ensure the immediate safety of the children (Fourie, 2002:5-8).

The following principles should guide practitioners:

- "The welfare of the children and their best interests should be of paramount importance.
- Acceptance of the right of children to be cared for, loved and protected within their natural family, if that will serve in the best interests of the children.
- Acceptance of the fact that persons involved with children in daily work are responsible for ensuring that children receive the necessary protection.

- Early identification and notification of children exposed or suspected of being exposed to abuse is essential.
- Prompt reporting and taking urgent and appropriate steps in order to protect children should always be a priority.
- Joint responsibility between professionals for combating child abuse and assisting identified cases will ensure that the best interests of children are served.
- Ensuring a continuation of services for as long as necessary.
- All children have a right to be heard and are part of the decision- making process as well as their families” (Fourie, 2002:5-15).

There are thus certain procedures and principles the social worker need to take into consideration when dealing with abused and/or neglected children. The social worker needs to respond immediately and report cases of abuse and neglect to ensure the maximum protection of children through addressing the problem and possibly removing the children from their families. The social worker needs to adhere to the specific principles set out to ensure the safety of children where the emphasis is placed on ensuring children are loved, cared for and protected by their families.

The social worker can only serve in the best interest of the families if there is a joint responsibility between professionals. An atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and support will enable the social worker to address the issues of abuse and neglect effectively.

The persons obliged to report these findings will be discussed in the following section. The reporting of cases of child abuse or neglect usually follows two routes, either mandatory or voluntary reporting.

## **2.6 REPORTING OF CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE**

According to section 42 (1) of the Act, as amended, every “medical practitioner, nurse, social worker, teacher or person employed in, managing a children’ home, place of care or shelter, who examines, attends or deals with children in circumstances giving rise to suspicions that the children are been ill-treated, suffer from injuries, or single or multiple

and nutritional deficiency, must immediately inform the Provincial Commissioner for Welfare or any offices designated by him/her concerning those circumstances”.

Generally there are two approaches to reporting abused and/or neglected children, namely mandatory and voluntary reporting. **Mandatory reporting** occurs where a designated person has a responsibility to report cases of child abuse/neglect that comes under his/her attention in his/her professional stance.

**Voluntary reporting** is where there is no responsibility on person to report abuse, even where he/she requires knowledge of abuse and/or neglect in the context of his/her profession (Children’s Amendment Bill, 2006).

### **2.6.1 Mandatory and voluntary reporting**

The statutory duty to report crimes against children set out in section 4 of the Prevention of Family Violence Act, 133 of 1993 provides for the mandatory reporting of cases of abuse or neglect to a “police official, commissioner of child welfare or social worker by any person who examines, attends to, advises or cares for children in any circumstances giving rise to reasonable suspicions”. Despite the existence of statutory frameworks for reporting the abuse and/or neglect of children in South Africa, reporting the cases of abuse and neglect of children remains low.

Although there is an increase in cases reported to the police it is estimated that the possibility still exists of substantial numbers of cases going unreported (Maree & Prinsloo, 2005:10-11). The use of discretion in the identification of child abuse and neglect is an important factor contributing to the high rate of non-reporting.

Social workers use their own judgment to decide on the need for removal, often not responding accordingly, which leads to a further increase in the abuse and neglect of children. The need to re-examine the current legal framework which requires professionals to report any reasonable suspicion or belief that children are abused has become apparent in view of the extent of children being abused in South Africa, and which often goes unreported (Peltzer & Phaswana, 2000:77). Social workers should not only rely on their own discretion, but work together in teams where different

professionals are included in the decision of finding children in need of care and the reporting of such cases.

South Africa has followed the guidelines set out by the USA since the 1960s by making the reporting of abused children obligatory, with failure to do so being a criminal offence where applicable.

In terms of section 42(1) of the Child Care Act of 1983 as amended, reporting of suspected ill-treatment of children is mandatory for “dentists, medical practitioners, nurses, social workers, teachers, and persons employed by or managing children’s homes, places of care and shelter” (Review of Child Care Act Executive Summary, 2002). They need to report their suspicions to the Provincial Department of Social Development, child protection organizations, police officials or the clerk of the children’s court (Children’s Amendment Bill, 2006). Persons mandatory to report in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 must send notifications of suspected cases to the District General of the Department of Social Development on form 35, as supplied in the Regulation as amended in 1988.

The District General is then required to request a police officer or social worker to take appropriate steps and to call for an investigation into the circumstances of the case, report on the circumstances and take action within 30 days.

Despite the importance of reporting cases of children who might be in need of care, it is imperative that this be done in a confidential manner. Part of protecting the rights of the children and their families refers to confidentiality, where the degree of confidentiality will be governed by the need to protect the children. Practitioners need to inform the families/children involved that confidentiality may not be maintained if withholding of the information will be detrimental to the well-being of the children. Ethical and statutory codes concerned with confidentiality and data protection are not intended to preclude the exchange of information between different professionals who have responsibility for ensuring the protection of children, but the extent of the confidentiality should always be governed by the need to protect the children.

In the reporting of cases of children being abused and neglected, practitioners are not only governed by confidentiality and ethical codes but they also need to be aware of how to function within the existing legislative framework.

The following section briefly summarizes the legislative construction set out in the Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996).

### **2.6.2 Existing legislation framework**

According to section 28(d) in the Constitution of South Africa all children have the right to “protection against maltreatment, neglect, abuse and degradation”. In section 28(2) children’s best interests are of importance in every matter concerning them.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the African Charter on Rights and the Welfare of the Child (1990), the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and the Children’s Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 are all indicators of the concrete legislative framework which guides social workers in the delivery of statutory services.

In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) section 19 of the convention maintains “ state parties take all the necessary measures to protect children from forms of physical/mental violations, injuries, abuse including sexual abuse while in care of their parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person in whose custody the children are placed”.

In the African Charter on Rights and the Welfare of the child, in the protection against child abuse it is stated that state parties should take social, educational and administrative legislation measures to protect children from all forms of merciless or degrading treatment and especially physical/mental injuries, abuse/neglect or maltreatment, including sexual abuse.

The Child Care Act (Act No. 74 of 1983) as amended is a suitable structure for the protection of children. The Act establishes the powers of the commissioner of child welfare and administer the function of the children’s court. It provides for official examination into causes of alleged abuse and neglect, for children’s court investigations

in such cases and for placement of children in alternative care or under social work supervision within their own homes when needed.

The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 also provides compelling guidelines in section 50, which state the “prosecution in all cases of all ill- treatment or abandonment of children ,while section 52 (A) prohibits child labour” .

The Children’s Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 aims to give effect to the constitutional rights of children regarding family care, parental care or appropriate alternative care when removed from their families. The objectives are to provide social services to children and protect them from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation and ensure their best interests are of principal importance. The act also makes provisions for services and means for encouraging and observing the physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of children and for generally protecting and ensuring children’s well-being.

The abovementioned legislative framework is essential in helping social workers understand the procedures to be taken during cases of child abuse and neglect, to provide better guidelines concerning the grounds for statutory removal and how to generally protect the children of South Africa.

In the statutory removal process it is imperative that the social workers assess children. The purpose of assessment is to verify information gathered during the assessment process and present the findings to the court. Assessment is also useful in predicting if children abused and/or neglected will be able to testify in court as well as establishing the risk whether children will be further abused and/or neglected when they return to their biological parents. Assessment will now be discussed.

### **2.6.3 Assessment**

Another important aspect of the statutory removal process is the assessment of abused children. The assessment of the children can be divided into the forensic assessment, the assessment of children as potential witnesses, and the risk assessment.

#### **2.6.3.1 Forensic assessment**

Forensic assessment aims to gather information concerning the impact of the alleged crime on the children's emotional and physical state. In cases of suspected abuse (no physical signs and no disclosure) or uncertainty regarding the disclosure, a social worker can apply certain procedures in order to confirm information conclusively made during assessments, and presented to the court by social workers as expert witnesses (*extracted from the RAPCAN Intermediary Training Manual, 2005*).

### **2.6.3.2 Assessment of children as potential witnesses**

Aspects such as the children's linguistic capability, the capability to differentiate between factual evidence and lies as well as standard developmental responsibilities are taken into account when considering whether children are able to be potential witnesses. The children's emotional state is also considered. This information can be presented to the court and recommendations can be made on whether children are potentially competent witnesses and whether they could be permitted to testify in a special courtroom or not.

### **2.6.3.3 Risk assessment**

The foremost task is in assessing the risks to abused children. Risk assessments are important in establishing whether children would be protected against future victimization and trauma and whether the children should be returned to their parents/guardian. There are a variety of guidelines enabling professionals to make a complete assessment of the children's risks.

These risk factors include the impact of the offender's behaviour on children, the severity of abuse/neglect, the children's age, the physical and mental ability of the children, the regularity and the regency of supposed abuse and neglect, credibility of the written report and the parental ability to protect the children and the level of co-operation of parents during the investigation.

The risk assessment can be done through the experienced interdisciplinary assessment team, and is undertaken on a planned and fully corresponding basis. Assessment is needed to decide whether protection intervention is necessary and if so, in what form.

Thereafter, if children are to be placed in care or under official supervision, assessment should guide the preference of care to be arranged and plans for consequent services, including any form of treatment which may be necessary. A significant element of assessment in cases of alleged abuse is the risk analysis. A process of calculating the risks of the numerous types of intervention, and when to abstain from intervening has to be taken into account for all children referred for protection services (Child Protection chapter 9, 2002).

When planning protection intervention and where a report is sufficient to justify a social work inspection, it is necessary first to determine whether any risks to the children can be dealt with by using the enabling/empowering approach (Child Protection Services, 2002). Such approaches, calling for the participation of the family in secondary prevention strategies, will be the first choice unless they are incapable to prevent harm to the children.

#### **2.6.3.4 Guidelines for assessment**

When assessing children in the statutory removal process the social worker has a difficult task in deciding which children are in need of care. There are however certain suggestions to assist the social worker regarding the right and permission to undertake routine and supplementary investigations, ensuring the neutrality of assessments and using the assessment framework to assist.

Suggestions in dealing with assessments are the following:

- “Right of the child protection practitioner in various disciplines to undertake routine investigations in response to accusations of abuse and neglect, before the case comes to court.
- Court orders for supplementary investigation and assessment where these are indicated if obligatory, at state costs.
- Appropriate provision for permission to examinations and assessments of the children concerned.
- A mechanism to ensure the neutrality of the assessment process, whether this is undertaken by a state facility or a professional in private practice.



- A broad risk assessment framework, adaptable to different local conditions to guide decision-making”.

The social worker thus needs to do a forensic, risk and potential witness assessment in order to determine the future plans, services or treatment to be delivered to abused children. The primary objectives of the forensic, risk and potential witness assessment will be discussed in the following section.

- **The forensic assessment**

The forensic assessment enables the social worker to understand the degree of abuse and how the abuse has affected the children. The risk assessment allows the social worker to give a conclusive report to the court to help them determine which action to take in the statutory removal process.

- **The risk assessment**

The risk assessment is essential in determining whether children will be protected against further victimization and whether it is possible to reunite the children with their families without being further abused. The assessment thus enables the social worker to decide whether the parents are capable of change or whether the children need to remain in foster care.

- **The assessment of children as being potential witnesses**

The assessment of children as being potential witnesses is another important factor in deciding whether they would be capable of testifying in court. This assessment takes into consideration children’s ability to explain verbally the extent of their abuse in a court room. When children are unable to explain their abuse they cannot testify in a court room and are eliminated from being potential witnesses.

During the assessment the social worker thus develops a better understanding of the extent and severity of the abuse as well as of the children’s ability to explain verbally the impact and nature of the abuse.

During assessment social workers need to remember their rights to routine investigations as well as children's rights in giving permission to examinations and assessments.

The assessment phase is thus essential in helping the social worker understand the impact of the abuse on children and allows the social worker to plan future services and intervention.

A social worker, after receiving the notification of the possible cases of children being abused or neglected, has to investigate the matter within 72 hours.

A balance needs to be struck between taking appropriate action to protect the children from abuse whilst at the same time protecting the children's families from harm caused by unreported intervention.

Social workers need to ensure that when children urgently need to be removed from their parents, the circumstances in terms of section 12 of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 are followed as instructed by the Act.

According to section 12 of the Child Care Act a police officer or social worker needs to issue a form 4 where the children are immediately placed in a suitable place of safety (Fourie, 2002:5-15). It is important that the circumstances leading to the completion of form 4 are investigated by social workers and revised by the commissioner of child welfare within 48 hours. According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 155), before children are brought before the children's court, a designated social worker must examine the matter and within 90 days compose a report in the prearranged manner on whether the children are indeed in need of care and protection. The designated social worker must report the matter to the relevant Provincial Department of Social Development.

If, after an investigation contemplated in subsection (2), the designated social worker finds that the child is not in need of care and protection, he or she must indicate the reasons for the finding in the report, which must be submitted to the children's court for review.

Certain forms have to be completed as mentioned above including the prescribed form 4, consisting of the warrant to remove and place the children in places of safety and the presented form 25, the notification of ill-treatment of children (2002:<http://www.doj.gov.za/dpapers/dp103.html>). Section 42(2) states that the Provincial Commissioner for Welfare or a designated officer may issue the warrant in the prearranged form for removal of children to a place of safety or hospital.

The prescribed form 4 is utilized for these purposes. Act 42 (3) provides for the District Commissioner for Welfare to arrange for the children and their parents to receive treatment as determined.

According to Eloff (1987:66) it is important to remember that both the children and their families must be prepared for court appearances in both the children's and criminal court matters. The children and their families must be informed of the outcomes of the court hearing. Failure to give such notice may constitute an irregularity, leading to problems during the proceedings. All children in respect of whom an inquiry and assessment are held in terms of section 13(3) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 must be in attendance at the court. According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 50) the person under whose control the children are must ensure that the children attend those proceedings except where the clerk of the children's court or the court directs otherwise. Only in exceptional cases, can children be excluded from attending the hearing. In such circumstances the Commissioner of Child Welfare may decide to postpone the inquiry to a later date. The social worker must explain to children beforehand what is going to take place and the necessity for such procedures, that a report will be read about their parents' circumstances and recommendations will be made about their future.

The Child Care Act of 74 of 1983 (section 31) stipulates that proper notice of ending the inquiry must be given to the parents, guardian or custodians of the children who are required to attend the inquiry in court. If children after the inquiry are indeed found in need of care they will be removed and placed in foster care where they will subsequently need reconstruction social welfare services.

## **2.7 SUMMARY**

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) thus clearly stipulates the specific procedures and process of statutory removal from a South African perspective. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) emphasizes the importance of strengthening family life where the family is still the primary unit of care, nurturance and socialization. There are however certain situations according to the Child Care Act 37 of 1983 and the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 which justify the removal of children from their parents.

The primary objective however is to continuously ensure that the best interests of children are upheld during the removal process. The children's court still has the responsibility to decide when children need to be placed in foster care and removed through the statutory process.

The statutory removal process consists of several phases. The first phase includes the prevention and early intervention services where the social worker needs to indicate the projected plan and prevent the children's removal. The second phase refers to the failed attempt to implement prevention and early intervention services, when it becomes clear that statutory removal is inevitable. Where the children are removed the social worker has the responsibility to investigate and provide evidence in the open court inquiry to assist the court in the decision whether placement in alternative care is necessary. When children are removed the social worker has to provide reunification services to the family, investigate the reasons for the removal and take preventative action to inhibit a recurrence of abuse or neglect.

In conclusion it seems that the statutory removal process involves the removal of children from their families after the social worker has done a thorough investigation and confirmed that the children are in definite need of care and protection and removal would be in the best interest of the children to ensure their safety.

In the next section the role of the social worker in foster care and reconstruction will be discussed to explain the importance of the social worker facilitating the reconstruction process.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN FOSTER CARE AND RECONSTRUCTION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are certain circumstances according to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 which justify the removal of children from their biological parents. Vulnerable children are removed and then placed in alternative care, for example, foster care. The social worker is the primary facilitator in the delivery of reconstruction services to the family in an attempt to address the problems that initially led to the removal of the children. Social workers thus play a fundamental role in the process of placing children in foster care and in the consequent delivery of services to children and their families.

In this chapter the role and tasks of the social worker during the foster care process will be explained. The focus will be on the historical background of foster care in South Africa with the emphasis on the legislation in South Africa guiding the social worker in the foster care process, the role of the social worker in the process of reconstruction delivery to foster and biological parents as well as the assessment of children regarding the possibility of reunification with their parents. The role of the social worker in the foster care and reconstruction process is explained to clarify and discuss the different tasks the social worker needs to undertake in the process of reuniting children with their families.

### **3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FOSTER CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A brief discussion of the historical background of foster care will be offered in order to develop a better understanding of the role of the social worker in the foster care context in South Africa.

According to Van Rensburg (2006:19), in the nineteenth century the churches of South Africa became the foremost institutions taking the responsibility to protect vulnerable and poor children and their families.

During the twentieth century there was a shift from the church, when legislation was implemented to provide safety for vulnerable and poor children in South Africa. Various welfare organizations for example the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging (ACVV) were established in 1904.

Numerous child care organizations were also established in Cape Town in 1908 and in Johannesburg in 1909 as well as the National Council for Child and Family Welfare in 1909. During the twentieth century the focus of the National Council for Child and Family Welfare was to act in coordination with numerous other organizations in South Africa. Establishments such as child and family welfare organizations play a fundamental role today in the placement of children in foster care (Van Rensburg, 2006:19). Most foster care placements are facilitated by child and family welfare organizations.

The delivery of welfare services in the foster care process is the collective responsibility of the governmental welfare departments as well as the non-governmental welfare organizations. The social worker renders a variety of services to children, youth and families which are managed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (Service Delivery Focus Groups, 2007). According to The Guideline to Foster Care Practice in South Africa, South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare (1987:2).

In South Africa foster care is the preferred form of alternative care for children abused, neglected or abandoned. In view of the large number of children removed from parental

care it can be concluded that social workers employed in both governmental and non-governmental welfare organizations have an important task to fulfil in the delivery of services to both children and their families in foster care (Eloff, 1987:1). In the following section the definition of foster care and reconstruction services will be explained briefly to provide a better understanding of the concepts.

### **3.3 DESCRIPTION OF RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES AND FOSTER CARE**

In order to understand the role of the social worker in the process of reunifying children with their parents it is imperative to give a description of the reconstruction and foster care processes. Reconstruction services are explained as any services the social worker delivers during foster care, and foster care is explained as a temporary, substitute care for children where the social worker is the main facilitator in assisting both the children and their families to address and resolve their problems. In the following section reconstruction services and foster care services will be explained.

#### **3.3.1 Reconstruction services**

Reconstruction services include all the services social workers render to children and their parents during foster care with the aim of reunifying the children with their biological families (Lerwick, 2002:6). According to Streak and Poggenpoel (2005:24) reconstruction refers to the services delivered by social workers to help children reunite with their families if possible.

#### **3.3.2 Foster care**

Foster care in the South African context is explained as the statutory substitute care for children who cannot be cared for by their parents in the short, medium, or long term, while services are continued to the parents in order to return the children to their care within a specific period (*New Dictionary for Social Work*, 1995:26). Webb (1996:211) cited in Moaisi (2003:7) identifies foster care as defined in the Child Care Act 1993 as the “placement by means of an order of the children’s court in the custody of a suitable family or individual, willing to act as foster parents to the children”.

In the South African context foster care refers to the full-time care of children by a person or a couple other than their biological parents where the caregivers are not assigned the constitutional rights or responsibilities of the biological parents (Kadushin cited in Rankin, 2002:6).

The conclusion is that foster care services can be defined as those services dealing with children removed from their biological parents and placed in a suitable alternative place of care. The *New Dictionary for Social Work* (1995) further defines the placement to be only for a specific period, where in the South African context and in the definition of Webb (1996) there is no specification regarding the time frame for children to be placed in foster care. In the South African context foster care does not imply that caregivers are to be assigned the constitutional rights and responsibilities of the biological parents. Neither Webb (1996) nor the *New Dictionary for Social Work* (1995) mentions the constitutional rights of individuals willing to look after foster children. The three definitions however all mention the need for foster children to be placed in substitute care while parents are unable to look after their children.

Foster care is a short-term arrangement which necessitates continuing monitoring through a social worker and the formulation of a case plan where the return of the children to their families is set out (Fukula, 2004:1).

According to Smith (1984:22) foster care further involves addressing the problems within the families and secondly ensuring continuous contact for the development of a healthy relationship between children and their families. Hence the children's court order not only recommends the place where children are placed, but also employs a social worker responsible for rendering reconstruction services to the biological family and supervision services to the foster children and foster parents, in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Child Care Act of 1983 and Social Assistance Act.

As noted by Eloff (1987:1) foster care gives the biological parents the chance to solve the problems that inhibit them from functioning as stable adults and as parents to their children. It also provides children with the opportunity to be cared for and nurtured during this period of separation from their family setting.



### **3.3.3 Legislation concerning foster care**

According to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (section 171) children are in foster care “if they have been placed in the care of a person who is not their parent or guardian as a result of an order of the children’s court” (Dealing with clients on an intake level, 2004:5). Foster care excludes the placement of children in a court-ordered kinship care, children in temporary safe care or in a youth care centre.

The placement of children is done with the assumption that reunification between the children and their biological parents is possible and in the best interests of the children. The court will submit certain conditions and requirements regarding the designated social worker’s facilitation of reunification services (Government Gazette, 2006:11). These conditions refer to social workers providing not only material assistance but also support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, health, education, clothing and housing (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999).

Legislation in terms of the Child Care Act 73 of 1983 regarding reunification is important to assist social workers in developing a better understanding of the need for services rendered to the children and their families. The decision regarding the placement of children in a specific foster care home is however complex seeing that there are various time frames regarding foster care placement and different forms of foster care in South Africa. The various options in foster care will be explained in the following section.

### **3.3.4 The purpose of foster care services**

The purpose of foster care services is to provide services to foster children, biological parents and the new foster family during the foster care process.

- **Services to foster children**

Foster care services provide support and services to children who are removed from their natural parents and who are vulnerable because of this separation. Children removed from their biological parents often have already suffered from abuse, neglect or ill-treatment and therefore require social services addressing their special needs, in the form of social, emotional, physical and psychological support. Support from the

social worker is further necessary to assist foster children's integration into their new foster family (Moaisi, 2003:13). Foster care in South Africa is the foundation of the child protection system where the focus is to facilitate the placement of foster children in need of care under the guardianship of a foster parent (Meintjies, 2005:1). The new foster family should provide an environment that encourages conventional maturation, which avoids further damage to children and corrects specific problems that hinder the healthy personality development of children (Puleng, 2004:10).

Foster care services to children thus address the specific needs of the foster children and facilitate the placement of the foster children into their new foster family.

- **Services to biological parents**

The purpose of foster care services to the biological parents is to assist them in the reunification process. Where appropriate, treatment and reconstruction services are delivered to biological parents to facilitate the process of reunification of the biological parents with their children (Meintjies, 2005:2).

In conclusion it is apparent that the social worker is the facilitator during the foster care process motivating the parents to communicate and interact with their children to ensure that both foster children and their biological parents can be reunited.

- **Services to the foster family**

During foster care, services are also rendered to foster families who require special assistance in supporting these vulnerable foster children (Meintjies, 2005:2). Foster parents also need financial support. The purpose of foster care services is to provide some reparation for foster parents who take foster children into their homes to provide for their family needs. The Social Assistance Act of 1992 makes provision for foster parents to apply for a foster child grant (Meintjies, 2005:1).

The purpose of foster care services is thus to provide vulnerable children with foster parents. The social worker needs to monitor how the foster parents support the children, and love and care for them during the temporary removal from their biological parents. The social worker has to ensure that children are placed in an appropriate foster home,

whilst at the same time ensuring that this placement will not further damage the children. The social worker is the key facilitator in the reconstruction process, addressing the problems of both the children and their families in order to reunify children with their families whilst at the same time providing supervision services to foster families during the fostering process.

The Child Care Act 73 of 1983 states that foster care provides children with a place of safety where both the children and their families can benefit from the re-unification and supervision services delivered. Parents have the opportunity to resolve their problems and the children have the opportunity to be kept in a safe place, where both their physical and emotional needs are met.

The foster care process where reconstruction services are facilitated by the social worker is thus fundamental in helping parents to correct the relationship with their children. Social workers facilitate a change in behaviour in both parents and children whilst helping the family to understand, address and change the problems that led to their initial disintegration (Diedericks, 2000:5). In the following section the legislation concerning foster care guiding social workers in the delivery of these services to the children and their families will be discussed.

### **3.4 DIFFERENT FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS**

When social workers place children in foster care, they have the option to either place the child in short, intermediate, long-term or permanent care. For the purpose of this study only short-term foster care where the primary objective is the reunification of the children with their biological parents will be discussed.

#### **3.4.1 Short-term foster care placements**

Short-term foster care is a service aimed at offering provisional custodial care for children whose parents are unable to care for them, in some cases temporarily and in other cases for an extended period. Short-term foster care is especially appropriate to assist and support the family during a family crisis such as a serious illness or death and in cases of abuse, neglect or abandonment where emergency care of the children

outside their home is needed for a limited and prescribed period, where early termination of the placement is part of the initial case plan. Determining the exact time for children to spend in foster care is not an easy process; the significant factor is not so much a definite time period as the potential of the parents to overcome their inabilities to care of their children (Eloff, 1987:12-15).

In order to assess whether the placement is likely to be short, intermediate or long term it is necessary for the social worker to determine whether there is a momentary breakdown in a family's capability to manage or whether it is indicative of a more fundamental breakdown, where the aim of the family to resolve the problem that led to the breakdown seems impossible to achieve (Eloff, 1987:12-14).

### **3.4.2 Types of foster care placements**

Apart from the different time frames of foster care placement, Van Rensburg (2006:23-24) also points to a further differentiation of three types of foster care in South Africa.

#### ***3.4.2.1 Traditional and kinship foster care placement***

In South Africa traditional foster care involves children who are removed because of neglect, abandonment or abuse and placed with foster parents. The other option refers to kinship care in the case of the death of a biological parent, where the government with the assistance of a social worker will give family members the legal rights to care for the children (SA Law Commission, 2002:714, cited in Van Rensburg, 2006:23-24). For the purpose of the study traditional foster care will be discussed.

Besides traditional and kinship foster care there should also be a focus on inclusive and exclusive foster care (Desmond, 2002:449).

#### ***3.4.2.2 Inclusive and exclusive foster care placements***

During inclusive foster care the focal point is the children's need to obtain a true sense of identity through the facilitation of all fostering participants. For example all immediate relatives, biological parents, foster parents and social workers should be assisting the

children to develop their identity. Exclusive foster care however only includes the foster parents and the social worker facilitating the process.

### **3.4.2.3 *Alternative forms of foster care***

The Discussion Paper of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, cited in Van Rensburg (2006:23-24) further advocates the relevance of alternative placements for children in South Africa which refer to community and group care. Community care refers to a group of foster parents acting as the guardian of the children living under one roof.

This form of foster care is recognized in the new Draft Bill (section 1) as a collective foster care scheme allowing a group of caregivers to share in the responsibilities of the children, although the children would live in a single family household (Fukula, 2004:2). These caregivers receive external support and monitoring through the social workers (Review of the Child Care Act, 2002). Group care refers to a few foster care children who are placed in the care of a volunteer under the supervision of a social worker during the foster care placement.

In conclusion it is thus apparent that there are different foster care placement options in South Africa. The difference in these foster care placements entails the number of people that are assigned the responsibility to care for the foster children. In traditional foster care placements the foster care couple are the only people responsible for the children placed in their care. In community foster care more than one or two people take care of the foster children.

A group of foster parents share the responsibility to care for the foster children placed under one roof and in the third foster care placement, namely group care, the children are placed in the care of a single volunteer responsible for these foster children. The different types of foster care thus relate to a difference in the number of people assigned the responsibility to care for the foster children, but all the foster care options have the same objective: to provide a safe place for children when removed from their biological parents.

For the purpose of the study the focus will be on the traditional form of foster care, allowing the researcher to focus on the role of the social worker in the delivery of reconstruction services to the children and their biological families.

The specific role of the social worker regarding the placement of foster children in foster care will now be discussed.

### **3.5 THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN FOSTER CARE REGARDING THE PLACEMENT OF THE CHILD**

During the placement of children in foster care social workers have various tasks to fulfil, which include the choice of foster home, providing supervision services to the children and their foster families and the application for financial support. The physical environment has a significant influence on the development of the children, thus it is a decision which needs to be taken with great consideration by the social worker. The choice of foster home is of crucial importance according to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

Children should be placed in a family environment which is conducive to their emotional, physical and social development. The choice of foster parents during the foster care placement is very important in providing children with an atmosphere supporting their development. Foster parents should at all times be fully aware and informed through the social worker of the children's safety, educational and cultural needs. This serves to encourage and motivate the foster parents to participate and make sure the children's best interests are ensured (Moaisi, 2003:15). Supervision services place an imperative function on social workers to visit the parents and children to implement reconstruction services and also to monitor the progress of the families in resolving their problems. Financial support through the implementation of the foster care grant is also a vital form of assistance to the families, helping them provide for the children's clothing, food and general maintenance (Van Rensburg, 2006:28). These are all very important services social workers deliver during foster care to ensure the best interests of the children are served at all times.

The decision to place children in a specific foster care home should not be taken lightly. The social worker has a responsibility to take into consideration the foster parent's ability to fulfil the needs of the foster children. According to Moaisi (2003:26) there are guidelines to assist social workers in the decision to make use of foster parents.

Children should be placed with foster parents in accordance with their cultural background, age, religion and home language. The children's cultural background, age,

religion and home language are important in the development of their identity and should be encouraged by their foster parents, The decision to place children in foster care where their cultural background, age, religion and home language are emphasized will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.5.1 Cultural concepts**

According to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 the cultural background of the children is a very important aspect to consider when the social worker makes the decision of placement.

Different cultures have different perspectives on child rearing, discipline, health care and education, as influenced by the specific beliefs and customs prevalent in their culture. Culture thus influences the foster parent's decision making on a daily basis, and has direct influence on foster children. As outlined in the Department of Welfare (1998:15), the future foster parents' norms, morals and values need to be taken into account if the social worker wants to make an informed decision regarding the placement of the children (Moaisi, 2003:26).

### **3.5.2 The age of the children**

The children's age is also a determining factor in the social workers' decision of placement. Van Niekerk cited in Moaisi (2003:27) emphasizes the ability of younger children to adapt more successfully to the foster care placement. Younger children seem to forget their biological parents' existence quickly and replace their biological parents with the foster parents. Older children however seem to have difficulties adapting to the new placement due to loyalty to their biological parents.

Van Niekerk (1998:98-99) states that the age of the children placed in foster care is of the utmost importance. The author believes it is the social worker's responsibility to assist both the younger and older children in continuous contact with their biological parents which will assist the family to reunify as soon as possible as well as help the young children keep the memories of their biological parents alive. Another important aspect to consider in placement is the religion of the children.



### **3.5.3 Religion**

The social worker has a duty to place children in a foster care placement where the foster parents have an understanding of the children's religious beliefs. Foster parents must be aware of the children's denominations and have respect for their religion. It is essential that social workers place children in a foster care setting which is similar to their religious beliefs, or at the very least does not conflict with their religious inclination (Moaisi, 2003:28). This is further emphasized in the Review of the Child Care Act (2002) section 31(1) of the Constitution of 1996 where children placed in foster care have a right to belong to their own culture, religion and linguistic community.

### **3.5.4 Home language**

Home language is another factor which should be focused on in the social workers' decision of foster care placement. For the children to have the confidence to communicate openly and freely with their newly appointed foster parents the same language is essential. Different languages could be seen as yet another obstacle for the children whereas the same language could be beneficial to their development.

Social workers thus have to take into account the following aspects when placing children in foster care (Government Gazette, 2006):

- “The foster parents should have a similar background to the children.
- Foster children should be placed with parents who do not share the same background to that of the children, only if there is no other family suitable for the placement of the children or there is an existing bond between the children and their new parents.
- Not more than six children may be placed in foster care with a single person or two persons sharing a common household, except where the children are siblings or the court considers this for any other reason to be in the best interest of all the children.
- More than six children are however allowed in cluster foster care schemes which provide for the children to be grouped in houses accommodating not more than six children per house” (Government Gazette, 2006).

The placement of children in foster care is not a quick and easy decision for social workers to make. Social workers have a duty as a court appointed facilitator of the foster care process to make sure that the best interests of the children are at all times upheld. Social workers thus have to ensure that the placement provides in the best interest of the children on various levels, where the children's cultural, linguistic and religious beliefs are of utmost importance if the placement is to provide a stable place of acceptance. According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 7) "in all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of children the standard that the children's best interests are of paramount importance, must be applied".

Social workers are the principal facilitators in the foster care process, not only playing a crucial role in the placement decision, but also providing numerous services to the children and their parents. In the following section the other services that social workers render during foster care will be discussed.

### **3.6 THE SOCIAL WORK PROCESS**

The social worker as mentioned above is the primary facilitator in the foster care process, delivering services during foster care to identify, address and change the parents' dysfunction and deliver reconstruction services. The process of delivering these services consists of seven phases, namely assessment, gathering of information, contact, contract, action, evaluation and termination.

It is however important to remember that each individual case where children are removed through the statutory process is different and the services rendered should accommodate individual cases (Review of the Child Care Act 73 of 1983, 2002). The phases will be discussed in the following section.

#### **3.6.1 Contact with the children**

The first phase is to identify the specific needs of the children where it is necessary for the social worker to develop a relationship of mutual trust. Implementing techniques such as respect for individualization permits the social worker to have respect for the

children's individuality, which at the same time gives the children the confidence to explain their situation during the initial contact (Lerwick, 2002:43).

### **3.6.2 Assessment**

The second phase is the assessment of the situation of the children and their families. According to Compton and Galaway (1999:253) assessment is the gathering and processing of data to provide information for use in making decisions about the nature and solution of the problem.

In the assessment phase the social worker needs to gather enough information about the foster children as well as the biological family to make an informed decision regarding their needs. Assessment thus enables the social worker to understand the dynamics and problems in families. The assessment phase should not be static, but rather continuous.

This will prevent social workers from only identifying the problems of the children and their families at a certain time, and not obtaining information continuously (Robertson, 2005:431).

According to the Review of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 the task of the social worker during the assessment phase is not only to focus on the problems, but to be actively involved in providing resources for the family and to take the environments influence on the family into account. In the delivering of services a constructive focus should thus be implemented, identifying strengths and areas of sufficient performance as opposed to only the parents' shortfalls (Budd, 2004:444).

### **3.6.3 Contracting with children and their families**

The third phase enables the social worker to develop a better understanding of the problems and needs of the family. This phase also enables the social worker to establish the willingness of the family to negotiate a contract to commit to reconstruction services in the process of reuniting children with their family. After the social worker has completed the assessment the social worker together with the family decides which

steps should be taken to address the problems and needs and exactly what measures should be taken to promote the possibility of reunification.

The rights of the children and their biological parents should be explained to them during this phase, which will guide and assist them regarding their responsibilities and duties during the foster care process (Review of the Child Care Act 74 of, 1983, 2002).

The social worker draws up a contract with the participating family and children, stipulating every member's responsibilities, tasks and the specific time frame in which these tasks should be completed, including the tasks and responsibilities of the social worker. The contract is a constant reminder, clarifying the different roles and responsibilities of both the social worker, the children and their biological families.

The contract also gives the social worker the opportunity to inform the biological parents and the children which services will be rendered during the foster care process, the objective of these services as well as the conditions under which the service will be rendered (Eloff, 1987:40).

According to Hepworth and Larsen (1995) the objectives of the contract are the specific goals the family need to accomplish in order for the family to change their behaviour that led to their initial disintegration. It is however important that goals should relate to the desired end results sought by the clients. These goals should be defined in explicit terms and must be feasible, as will be explained in the following section.

- **Goals relating to clients' desired end results**

To be motivated clients must believe that accomplishing selected goals will enhance their life situations by resolving their problems. Clients are more likely to participate and follow goals which they believe will change their situations. Therefore social workers should guide clients towards selecting their goals and should share their expertise, but they should avoid imposing their own goals on clients.

When social workers impose their own thoughts on which goals are to be chosen this will lead to resistance from both the foster children and their parents possibly resulting in the termination of the social work process (Hepworth & Larson, 1995:367).

- **Explicit goals**

In the social work process it is important for the social worker to specifically define the desired end results of the goals so that both the foster children and biological parents are clear about which changes are needed to accomplish the goals.

Explicit goals refer to specific behaviours, actions or environmental changes that foster children and their biological parents should achieve during the intervention process (Hepworth & Larson, 1995:367).

- **Feasible goals**

It is necessary for the goals to be feasible. Selecting unachievable goals will set clients up for failure and will encourage their feelings of despair and defeat. Therefore it is important to consider the capacity of the children and their parents for accomplishing the set goals. The social worker needs to be sure that the goals are feasible regarding the children and their parents' abilities, strengths and limitations as well as the possible negative influence of their environment (Hepworth & Larson, 1995:369).

In conclusion it is clear that goals are important to give direction to clients regarding which changes they need to make to alter their situations. When the goals and the means of accomplishing them are clearly specified both children and their parents have a better understanding of their role in the social work process.

Explicit goals thus enable foster children and their biological parents to understand the exact behaviour, changes and actions they need to accomplish during the reconstruction process.

During this phase a parenting plan is formulated laying out the detailed steps in the foster care process that the social worker, the foster children and their biological parents will take to move from the problems identified to reach the desired solutions (Compton & Galaway, 1999:305). The parenting plan stipulates the connection with parental responsibilities and rights, including the contact between the children and their parents as well as the intervention that needs to be delivered to both the children and their biological parents (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:9).

It is important that the social worker actively involves the parents in the development of the parenting plan, allowing parents to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in the parenting plan (Chipungu, 2004:88).

#### **3.6.4 The action phase**

The next phase refers to action and will be discussed subsequently (Lerwick, 2002:42). The action phase is characterized by interaction between the children and their biological parents. The social worker is the facilitator in the process, motivating the parents to communicate and interact with their children to establish and improve their relationship. According to Compton and Galaway (1999:311) the primary objective of the facilitator's role is to assist the clients and the other party to find a common ground on which to reach a resolution.

It has therefore become apparent that the social worker should encourage both the foster children and their biological parents to communicate and explore their common interests in a successful reunification. This will assist the family in reaching a convergence of the perceived interests in reuniting and resolving the problems that led to their family's disintegration.

Both the children and their parents should always be emotionally prepared before the meeting. This will help both the children and their parents understand the importance of open communication and respect for each other, and will also help eliminate some of the fears children and parents have before the contact.

The social worker plays an active role in this phase, observing the interaction between the children and their parents, enabling him or her to see if any progress has been made regarding the parents' ability to communicate with their children.

#### **3.6.5 Formulation and implementation of the reconstruction process**

The next phases to be discussed refer to the formulation and implementation of the reconstruction process with the objective of reunification of children and their biological parents.

If reunification is possible, the sixth phase will entail that the social worker, together with the children and their parents decide on how, when and where reunification will take place. This is a crucial phase in the reconstruction process, entailing concrete steps to be taken towards the reunification process.

According to the Government Gazette (2006:58) vulnerable parents and their children by order of the children's court should receive intervention services in the form of professional counselling, rehabilitation programmes, specified skills development or other appropriate problem-solving forums in the process of reconstruction services during foster care, enabling the parents to have their children returned to their care as soon as they have overcome their problems.

The social worker plays a vital part in this phase, assisting the family to make decisions on the exact date and exactly how reconstruction services will be delivered to enhance reunification.

### **3.6.6 Evaluation**

The next phase refers to evaluation, which is another important phase in determining which goals the family have achieved, and the obstacles that might prevent them from achieving a successful reunification (Lerwick, 2002:43). In the seventh phase it is imperative for the social worker in order to determine the progress the children and their parents have made, to identify which goals have been achieved and which aspects in the reconstruction process still need to be addressed before the family can reunite.

Evaluation is done continuously throughout the entire foster care process, enabling the social worker to identify new problems that need to be addressed. According to Compton and Galaway (1999:462) the continuous evaluation of the foster children and their biological parents provides the social worker with new information throughout the foster care process, allowing ongoing reassessment of objectives, intervention plans and even of the problems defined in this phase. Continuous evaluation thus enables the social worker to reassess objectives and possibly change the intervention delivered if necessary. However, if during the evaluation phase it becomes apparent that both the

foster children and biological parents can be reunited it is possible for the social worker to prepare them for the next phase, which is the termination phase.

### **3.6.7 The termination phase**

The last phase to be discussed refers to termination (Lerwick, 2002:45). Even though this phase recommends that the social worker terminate the sessions with the children and their families, the social worker still needs to deliver services for at least six months after reunification. This provides the social worker with the opportunity to continue monitoring and supporting the family and address integration issues that might appear. The integration problems can then be attended to before they become obstacles preventing the family to adjust to the reunification with their children (Lerwick, 2002:46).

Each of these phases is important to investigate the reasons why children left their parental home, address those reasons and take preventative action to prevent a recurrence. Addressing the reasons for the families' disintegration provides the family with a chance to develop a better understanding of their problems through the objective viewpoint of the social worker.

A social worker enables both the foster children and the biological parents in the foster care process to utilize this time to change their negative behaviour and address their problems in order to facilitate the reunification, whilst having the continuous support and motivation from the social worker. Most parents want their children to return to their care and want to work out the reasons for their inability to care for their children, as long as they have the hope that their lives can improve through the motivation and support from the social worker (Collins & Jordan, 2006:23). The social worker's role should not be just to focus on the problems of clients, but also to help them identify the role the environment plays in their lives and the strengths they have to empower themselves to improve their parental capacity.

In the next section the services that social workers deliver to the foster parents, biological parents and the children during the foster care process will be explained. For the purpose of the study the focal point will be the delivery of services to the children



and their biological parents; however, the researcher will briefly explain the services delivered to the foster parents.

### **3.7 DELIVERING OF SERVICES TO FOSTER PARENTS, BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND FOSTER CHILDREN**

Reconstruction services have to be delivered to all the parties involved in the foster care process to encourage lasting reunification efforts. The delivery of services to the foster parents will first be explained.

#### **3.7.1 Supervision services to foster parents during foster care**

Children are placed with foster parents in accordance with section 15(1)(b) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (Diedericks, 2000:5). The primary objective of the services delivered to foster parents during foster care entails the preparation for the children's integration into the new family and supervision of the placement.

The social worker needs to prepare the foster parents regarding the children's behaviour and possible negative reactions to the placement. This will equip the foster parents to be aware of the reasons for the children's specific behaviour and help them find ways to accept and understand the children's possible negative reactions. The social worker can assist the foster parents in decision making regarding the choice of school, and medical, physiological and emotional aspects of the children's functioning (Van Rensburg, 2006:37). It is of the utmost importance to prepare foster parents for the meeting with the children.

Many times foster parents are unable to understand the children's negative reaction towards them and feel they are to blame, leaving them feeling incompetent and hopeless. This will have a negative impact on the relationship between the children and their foster families, possibly leading to a placement breakdown where the foster family may terminate the foster care placement (Van Rensburg, 2006:37).

In conclusion, it is important for social workers to assist foster parents before their meeting with the foster children as well as to give them guidance during the foster care

placement. In the next section the delivering of services to the biological parents through the facilitation of the social worker will be discussed.

### **3.7.2 Reconstruction services to biological parents**

The Guideline for Foster Care Practice SANC (1987:26) clearly stipulates that if services are not rendered to the parents, any services to the children will be ineffective. The main objective in the delivery of reconstruction services to parents is to help change the social functioning of parents and improve their ability to fulfil their parental role. This can be achieved by the social worker acting as a teacher, teaching parenting and life skills (Compton & Galaway, 1999:309-312).

In teaching parents how to care for and protect their children they are not only teaching the parents valuable guidelines in being a competent parent, but are at the same time facilitating the healing process where children and parents learn to trust each other enough to be reunited again (2007:[http://www.South\\_Africa.children.gov.za/Publications/policies32.htm](http://www.South_Africa.children.gov.za/Publications/policies32.htm)). Being a competent parent involves helping children to be healthy, independent and well-adjusted (2007:<http://www.facts.gov.au/family/early/childhood/volume2.htm>).

The delivery of services to the biological family is important, where the emphasis is squarely placed on the facilitation of continuous contact to enable the children and their parents resolve the problems that led to the initial placement. The social worker assists parents to understand their role in being competent parents, especially through the delivery of parenting and life skills training. Kleijn (2004:83) stresses the importance of creating individual intervention programmes in the foster care process, where specific goals for all the family members are set out. Such a programme should thus be formulated together with the family; the participation of the entire family is crucial in order to understand the needs and challenges of all the family members. If intervention programmes to facilitate reconstruction were to be successfully implemented it is necessary for the programmes to be tailored more for the specific needs of the children and their families in crisis.

It is important for social workers to remember not only to assess and deal with problems, but rather develop and empower families by providing support and teaching practical life skills (Kleijn, 2004:44-46). Another important service to be delivered by social workers is aimed at foster children.

### **3.7.2.1 Service delivery to foster children**

According to the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 156) the order made by the court stipulates that children placed in foster care should receive supervision services by a designated social worker. In the delivery of services to the children it is necessary that the social workers do not only plan for the children's placement but also assist the children in the integration into the new family, helping them with the initial adjustment and to immediately facilitate continuous contact with their biological parents to provide the connection between their present and past.

There are however several issues the social worker needs to address during service delivery to foster children, including building a relationship of trust, explaining the reasons for their removal, establishing contact with their biological parents, addressing children's emotional, educational and self-esteem problems, teaching children life-skills, adhering to children's cultural background and facilitating the foster care grant. Building a relationship of trust with children will now be discussed.

- **Relationship of trust**

According to Eloff (1987:62) the social worker needs to work with the children in building a relationship of trust. The purpose of building a relationship of trust with the children is to enable the social worker to understand the children's worries, nervousness, needs and uncertainties, as well as their expectations and ambitions for the future. This not only helps the social worker to place the children in an environment which will enable them to feel accepted and content, but also empowers the social worker to provide accurate services during the foster care placement, in concurrence with the children's aspirations for their future.

Building a relationship with the children gives the social worker the opportunity to help the children understand and accept their own life situations, and helping them realize the reasons for their placement in foster care (Eloff, 1987:62). Assisting children to understand the reasons for their placement will be discussed in the following section.

- **Reasons for placement**

According to Steyn (2005:39) the social worker should strive to enable foster children to understand their past, explaining in a logical and socially acceptable way the reason for their placement. This enables the children to recognize the reasons for their parents' behaviour and develop an understanding for the situation in which they are placed as well as the reasons for their perceived rejection.

When children understand the reasons for their placement in foster care they feel less anger towards their parents and therefore are able to utilize the time in foster care to heal and grow. When the social worker help the children develop insight regarding their placement in foster care, the children also develop new methods of expressing their feelings and behaviour and also understand that they are not to blame for their removal. Understanding the reasons for their removal from their biological parents assists children with the process of healing and forgiving. Only when children have forgiven their parents and developed a true sense of understanding for their parents' actions is it possible for children and parents to meet and initiate the reunification process. Contacting the parents will now be discussed.

- **Contact with parents**

Another essential role of the social worker is to facilitate continuous contact between the children and their parents. According to Bainham and Lindley (2004:73) children not only have a right to have knowledge of their parents, but they have a right, as far as possible to maintain direct and regular contact with them when separated.

The social worker plays a mediating role, helping children repair the links with their parents through continuous contact in an attempt to reunify the children with their families (Biehal & Wade, 2004:434).

The children and their parents have the opportunity to have meetings where the social worker helps both the children and their parents resolve the problems that inhibit parents from being positive role models in their children's lives (Arizona Department of Health Services, 2006.) Palmer (2004:78-79) advises that children should have the opportunity to explain their feelings, problems and needs to their parents during contact sessions. Contact is associated with the improvement of parents' feelings toward the placement, providing a better environment for children to work through their problems, and at the same time reducing feelings of isolation between parents and their children.

Parent visitation is regarded as the most important objective of child welfare intervention for sustaining parent-child relationships required for successful reunification (Haight & Black, 2002:175).

Social workers have reported that in cases where continuous contact between children and their parents is established, the chances of reunification were approximately 10 times more likely (Davis & Landsverk, 1999:1). When the reunification seems possible, social workers also deliver supporting services to the children to eliminate possible deprivations and damage that might have developed during the separation from their parents (Department of Health and Welfare, 1990:6). Addressing the possible deprivations and damage will enhance the prompt return of children to their parents. Foster children often have emotional and educational problems because of the possible deprivations or damage they suffered whilst in their biological parents' care. These problems will now be discussed.

- **Emotional and educational problems**

The social worker needs to be aware that due to the possible deprivations or damage which resulted from their previous inadequate or unpleasant life circumstances, foster children might need supplementary care or therapy to help them in their further development.

According to Cuddeback (2002:882) many children in foster care have significant emotional and educational problems. Emotional difficulties usually stem from the children's original reasons for leaving their family including abuse, neglect or

abandonment, a sense of rejection and the feeling of being different from the children they are growing up with. Social workers have to assist children to build on their strengths, empowering them to focus on their positive attributes and strengths (Hodges, 2005:49-50).

Educational needs are also often neglected in foster children, hence the importance of social workers assisting children in meeting the educational requirements at school. The changes in placement often have a negative influence on school performance, as well as on attendance (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect, 2005). The social worker's role is to improve the relationships between the educational personnel and the children, involving them in the case plan formulated for the children. This will help the educational personnel understand the children's situation and give extra support, motivation and understanding to meet their educational needs. A lowered self-esteem is another problem that foster children often present because of the separation from their parents, and will be discussed subsequently.

- **Development of self-esteem**

The social worker's relationship of trust and influence on the children is of the utmost importance in helping the children to develop and build a positive self-esteem. Through the facilitation of the social worker the contact with their parents enables the children to develop their own identity and stay positive about the future reunification with their biological parents.

The children need information on their genealogical background for the critical stages in identity formation, especially during their teenage years. When these vulnerable children do not receive the relevant information they have problems in building their own identity, especially regarding difficulty in identifying with peers (Puleng, 2004:28).

Another ability foster children often lack are basic life skills due to improper parenting and unstable living circumstances. The social worker should empower foster children by teaching life skills. The importance of life skills will now be discussed.

- **Teaching of life skills**

According to Steppingstones Foster Care (2007) another important service social workers need to deliver is the teaching of basic life skills. Many of the children lack basic life skills due to inappropriate parenting and insecure living circumstances. Social workers need to teach children values consistent with today's societal norms such as good manners, cleanliness, and other age-appropriate skills. These skills will also benefit the children in the future, where they themselves will have to be parents, and be positive role models to their children. Foster children are thus assisted by the social worker in the foster care process by learning new skills. Foster children need assistance on a financial level as well. The facilitation of the foster care grant will be discussed in the following section.

- **Facilitation of foster care grant**

An important role of the social worker in the delivery of services to the children is the facilitation of the foster care grant. Children are generally maintained by the means of a foster child grant paid by the government, with a corresponding duty on the part of the parents to contribute towards the children's maintenance in the form of a contribution order. Foster parents are only permitted to receive the grant in cases where their financial circumstances are below a certain level.

The means test to qualify for the foster care grant is dependent on the income of the foster children, not on the income of the parents. The foster care grant is R590 a month paid usually for a two-year period only as arranged by the children's court (Grant for fostering a child, 2006). In the delivery of foster care services to children the social worker should at all times be informed and sensitive to the children's cultural background, which will now be discussed.

- **Cultural background**

In delivering foster care services to children the social worker needs to be aware at all times of the children's cultural background. Green (1980:17) cited in Puleng (2004:3) emphasizes the importance of understanding the culture of the children one is working

with in order to be capable to react to their needs astutely, hence the social worker's need to be fully aware of the culture of the children before services are planned. In conclusion, when social workers address the problems of foster children it is important to keep in mind the clients' cultural background. This will help the social worker understand the problems in the context of the children's history

- **Adjustment to new family**

Social workers not only play an important role in helping foster children adjust to their new families, but also have the important task to meet the children's basic and extra needs in attempting to return the children to their families as soon as possible. Foster children, despite their parents' abandonment, neglect or abuse, still love their parents, and many foster children want to return to their biological parents. Social workers are the primary facilitators in the process of deciding whether children have progressed enough to be returned to their families. These services can be delivered through case, group or community work. The choice of service will be determined by the social worker in accordance with the needs of the family.

### ***3.7.2.2 Utilization of social work methods***

According to Eloff (1987:39) services can be delivered utilizing case work, group work or community work. Case work is usually implemented where the emphasis is on counselling to change the personality functioning of the parent, deliver behaviour modification therapy and role play. Group work however is especially effective in situations where role play is required.

The use of role play is especially effective in aiding parents to see the different dynamics of effective parenting roles, and clearly show through role play how parents sometimes are unable to fulfil their parental role because of a specific crisis in the family. Community work is also utilized through social workers to strengthen parenting capacity. Services at community work level can be general, such as the modification of problems that inhibit parents bringing up their children, or can be more specialized in providing resources in the community to help parents in their everyday lives, for example providing day care (Eloff, 1987:39). In the delivery of case, group and



community work during foster care it is important for social workers to remember that the immediate, intensive delivery of reconstruction services seems to have a positive correlation with the reunification of the children and their parents.

It is however sometimes impossible for social workers to limit the reconstruction services to the required time frame. The delivery of reconstruction services within a specific time will be discussed in the following paragraph.

### **3.7.2.3 *Time and duration of reconstruction services***

According to Eloff (1987:40) the best time to deliver reconstruction services to the parents is immediately after the placement because parents are motivated and optimistic about changing their behaviour. The social worker should thus take a directive role in improving the area of dysfunction responsible for the initial placement.

Sometimes service delivery has to be implemented for a longer period, especially in cases where there is a fundamental breakdown in parental functioning. Here again the social worker must make sure contact between the children and their parents are continuous. The social worker needs to assist parents in dealing with the environmental or personal stresses that led to their dysfunctional behaviour and inability to take care of their children (Eloff, 1987:40).

According to Kleijn (2004:71) one of the obstacles preventing children to be reunited with their parents is the inability of parents living in poverty to utilize the parenting and life skills programmes because they have to concentrate on finding food, clothing, housing and employment.

Transport is another obstacle to reunification because clients do not have the means to attend intervention programmes offered in the reconstruction process of foster care. Parents living in poverty often have a very low chance of being reunited with their children due to the lack of involvement in intervention programmes.

The reunification of children and their parents however will never be achieved through the social worker's facilitation of programmes during foster care if the most basic needs of these families are not met and poverty alleviation is not addressed.

According to the South African Government Services (2007) the social worker thus has a responsibility to first assist families to achieve their concrete needs in an attempt to reduce poverty. This will have an immediate impact on the parents involvement in the various programmes that were originally planned during the assessment phase drastically improving the chances of the children being reunited with their parents. The social worker thus delivers services to the foster family to prepare them for the arrival of the foster children, equipping them with the knowledge to understand and react appropriately to the possibly negative reactions foster children might present in the new foster care placement.

Services are also delivered to the biological parents during the foster care process to assist the parents in learning the necessary parenting and life skills to enhance their ability to take care of their children.

Services however should also be delivered to the foster children. The social worker will assist the foster children in the integration process into their new foster family to help with any problems, questions or fears regarding their new placement. In the foster care process the social worker will continue to assist the foster children in building their self-esteem, teaching them life-skills and explaining the reasons for their placement to facilitate their healing process. The delivery of services will not only empower the foster family, biological parents and foster children but it will enhance the reunification process by addressing and changing the problems that the biological parents and foster children presented during the assessment phase.

The services that social workers deliver during the foster care process in conjunction with addressing the family's concrete needs will thus empower the family to build a better relationship with one another. The next section will be used to explain the specific delivery of reconstruction services through social workers. The social worker has the responsibility to deliver tertiary services, which include reconstruction services and reunification services to families during the foster care placement. This includes the strengthening of families to be able to carry out family responsibilities (South African Government Services, 2007).

### **3.8 RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES**

In order for the children to be returned to their biological parents it is essential that social workers deliver reconstruction services. Reconstruction services are categorized as all the services social workers deliver in an attempt to return the children to the care of their parents (*New Dictionary for Social Work* 1995:26). The legislation regarding reconstruction services will be discussed in the following section.

#### **3.8.1 Legislation regarding reconstruction services**

According to the Review of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983, in every case plan where children are placed in foster care, the court will be supplied with a standard plan with the objective of achieving stability for the children, with priority given to family reunification, unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. The standard plan must also include the time frames for possible reunifications, as well as time frames for regular reviews regarding the progress. The plan must clearly stipulate the services and programmes the social worker plans to deliver to the children and their parents during foster care. In the following section the reconstruction services delivered by the social worker during the foster care placement will be discussed.

#### **3.8.2 Reconstruction services**

The social worker facilitating the reunification of the children with their families in terms of subsection (1) (b) (11) must “investigate the causes why the children left the family home initially, address those causes and take precautionary action to prevent a recurrence”. The social worker should provide counselling to both the children and their families before and after reunification (Government Gazette, 2005). During reconstruction the social worker has the task to involve the children and their parents in programmes.

During delivery of these programmes, social workers continuously monitor how the clients have accomplished the specific tasks and milestones that were identified in the case plan. The case plan is thus another form of measurement to review the children and their parents’ progress and the possibility of being reunited.

The social worker throughout the process of fostering is also responsible for supervision and reconstruction services and the issuing of reports with suggestions for the case outcome to the court regarding the possibility of children returning to their parents (Reich, 2007:116-119).

The goal of supervision and reconstruction services is to diminish the threat identified during the statutory removal process so that children can return and live safely with their parents. Parents must reform their parental behaviour and family dynamics before they will be able to receive legal custody over their children. Reconstruction services play a fundamental role in the foster care process because they include all the social worker's efforts to implement intervention in an attempt to help the family resolve their problems (Unrau, 2004:1-13).

Delfabbro and Cooper (2003:29-32) state that the reconstruction process can be categorized as either a passive or an active process. A passive process is where the social worker does not render any intervention services and the children go home due to factors beyond the social workers control. These include parents' release from prison or improvements regarding their health.

For the purpose of the study only the active process will be focused on where social workers have a direct influence on the children's return through the delivery of reconstruction services to improve poor parenting skills, behaviour management problems and for example parent-child conflict. According to Delfabbro and Cooper (2003:29-32) the possibility of reunification is increased when social workers deliver intensive reconstruction services, where all the parties involved clearly understand their responsibilities and tasks in the reconstruction process.

In conclusion it seems that reconstruction's primary objective is intervention with both the children and their biological families in order to investigate the causes of the families' disintegration and prevent a recurrence of their problems in the future. The social worker has to continuously monitor the progress of the family during the reconstruction process and give feedback to the courts regarding their progression and possibility of reunification.

Reconstruction services should also include activities to promote an environment conducive to the development of the strengths and skills of the children and their parents to promote reunification. In addition, the social worker should link the parents with relevant resources while the children are in foster care and encourage and arrange visits of the parent to the child, as well as of the children to their parents, in addition to other regular forms of contact, such as telephone calls and letters. The two years which the court order has set for the children to be placed in foster care is sufficient time for reconstruction services to be delivered by the social worker (Delfabbro & Cooper, 2003:29-32). Children can be reunited with their parents before the end of the two-year period if the social worker believes the biological parents are able to take care of their children. The social worker should thus during the delivery of the reconstruction services always be aware of the possibility of the children to be reunited with their parents. On the other hand, social workers can provide a report to the court stating the circumstances of the children and their parents, identifying the need for the children to remain in foster care due to the inability of the parents to take care of their children.

In westernized countries a guiding principle is the belief that children in foster care should be returned safely to their families as (and wherever) possible (2001:<http://www.South Africa/newyork/consulate/socialwelfare.html>).

Thus, with the exception of cases in which children have been victims of severe abuse, a proportion of the social workers' time and resources is directed toward the implementation of specific plans and reconstruction services designed for the delivery of programmes to encourage and facilitate reunification. The Family and Marriage Society of South Africa recognizes the fact that no single structure can replace the family as the primary moulding unit for each of its members, and therefore warrants strengthening of the whole family.

Social workers usually plan to work closely with children's families after placement, both to facilitate communication and to work toward reuniting the families. These plans are unfortunately often aborted due to other claims on the social worker's time and by complications arising from family contact.

Children should be returned to their biological parents as soon as possible. In the reunification of children with their parents there are certain questions that social workers can utilize to decide the possibility of the children being reunited with their families. These questions will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.9 ASSESSMENT OF THE CHILDREN'S PROGRESS**

Eloff (1987:50) states that in order to assess the current situation in a foster care placement the social worker should constantly review the placement situation. This enables the social worker to monitor the progress or lack thereof made by the biological parent and the appropriateness of the service delivery by the welfare organization. If no progress is made by the biological parents the social worker can re-evaluate the reconstruction services delivered and change or adapt the services to the needs of the parents. Apart from reviewing the services rendered to the parents, it is also necessary to review the supervision services to the children in foster care. Often the children's needs change or they need additional services. Services can then be altered to address the additional needs of the children.

According to (Eloff, 1987:50) the first review should take place within the first three months of the placement and a subsequent review on a six-monthly basis. This will enable the social worker to be aware of the progress or lack of progress made by the parents to resume custody of their children. This will also enable the social worker to present a more complete report to the Minister at the end of the first two years of the placement.

According to Benade (2002:163-166) there is a specific measuring scale that can be used to identify the social functioning of the children and their parents with the aim of placing the children back with their families.

These questions are divided into 10 separate sections. The table below (3.1) presents the criteria by which the social functioning of the children and their parents is evaluated.

**Table 3.1: The social functioning of children and their parents**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section A: The intellectual and physical ability of the parents regarding the delivery of reconstruction services</b></li> </ul> <p>-Do the parents understand the goal of the reconstruction services?</p> <p>-Do the parents present insight regarding the reasons for the intellectual and physical abilities of taking care of their children?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section B: Pathology</b></li> </ul> <p>-Is the pathology present during the placement of the child's removal, removed?</p> <p>-Is the pathology currently present detrimental to the safety of the children?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section C: Cooperation between the social worker and the parents</b></li> </ul> <p>-Do the parents portray a positive relationship with the social worker?</p> <p>-Did the parents attend the sessions regularly?</p> <p>-Did the parents adhere to the contract drawn up in the beginning stipulating the social worker and the client's responsibilities and tasks?</p> <p>-Were the parents honest and motivated to change the reasons for the removal of their children initially?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section D: Contact between the children and their parents</b></li> </ul> <p>-Did contact occur?</p> <p>-Did contact occur during holidays and weekends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the contact beneficial for the child/children?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section E: Physical care during placement</b></li> </ul> <p>-Did the parents ensure that their children have a daily balanced meal and clothing?</p> <p>-Did the parents attend to the medical needs of their children?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section F: The relationship between the parents</b></li> </ul> <p>-Do the mother and father fulfil their parental role sufficiently?</p> <p>-Do the parents' relationship have a positive influence on the children?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section G: The relationship between the child and the parents</b></li> </ul> <p>-Do the parents teach the children to have respect for adults?</p> <p>-Do the parents know which school and grade the children are attending?</p> <p>-Are the parents aware of the children's academic achievements and school</p>

attendance? -Are the parents able to listen attentively to their children?
<b>- Section H: Financial situation</b> -Do the parents have work? -Are the parents stable in their work, placed in their work for a minimum of one year? -When parents have stress-related issues concerning their work, are they able to handle the situation? -Do the parents allocate a certain amount of money in their budget to the contact sessions with their children? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Do parents save money in cases of emergency or for unseen expenses?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Section I: Housing</b></li> </ul> -Are the costs of the housing affordable to the parents according to their financial abilities? -Does the housing provide in the children's needs?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Section J: Moral standards</b></li> </ul> -Do the parents take responsibility towards the children's religious teachings? -Do the parents provide a good example towards their children regarding moral standards?

**Source:** Benade (2002:163-166).

Table 3.1 in Benade (2002:163-166) gives a brief summary of the questions utilized to test the possibility of children being reunited with their parents. These questions can be utilized in the process of assessing the progress made by the children and their parents since the delivery of reconstruction services by the social worker.

Using these questions as a guideline the social worker can ensure that all the relevant aspects are examined in making sure the family have progressed and changed to cope with the responsibilities of taking care of the children. The children can be reunited with their biological families if the social worker is assured that the parents are able to provide in the physical, intellectual and emotional needs of the children, and the social worker has reviewed the case thoroughly through the implementation of the above-



mentioned questionnaire. The reunification of the children with their biological parents will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.10 THE REUNIFICATION OF THE CHILDREN WITH THEIR BIOLOGICAL PARENTS**

Children should be returned to their parents as soon as the reasons for the initial removal no longer exist (Kleijn, 2004:103). If reunification services are properly and regularly carried out, they can gradually heal the parent-child relationship to the extent that it sometimes becomes possible to return the children to their families. Unfortunately reconstruction services generally tend to remain erratic and inadequate due to the inability of cash-strapped welfare organizations to employ sufficient social workers to manage the workload involved, and inability to retain the services of those with skill and experience due to poor working conditions (Child Care Act 74 of 1983, 2002:169). Another reason for poor reunification refers to both the children and their parents often having many fears regarding the reunification. Parents often doubt their own ability to successfully care for their children, without their children being removed again. Children have their own fears regarding their parents' ability to maintain a good relationship with them, and being returned to their foster parents.

Social workers thus have a responsibility to help the family establish norms which will allow for mutual warmth and respect to be built in the family and enhance the chances of reunification. The reunification process is complex, and in many cases the initial conflict, problems and fears return (Steyn, 2005:40).

The social worker in the delivery of reconstruction services during foster care needs to be aware of the challenges and changes in legislation to effectively implement services to help children reunite with their families. In chapter 3 the focal point was thus to discuss the role of the social worker in foster care and the reconstruction process.

### **3.11 SUMMARY**

Children should be removed from situations where they are found to be in need of care and placed in foster care where the social worker can deliver supervision and reconstruction services. Foster care is a temporary solution to prevent children from further abuse and neglect with the primary objective to return them to their biological parents.

When the social worker places children in foster care it is imperative to ensure the placement is appropriate, hence the importance of focusing on foster children's cultural background, age, religion and home language to ensure similarities with their new environment with their foster parents. According to the Review of the Child Care Act (2002), section 31(1) of the Constitution of 1996, children placed in foster care have a right to belong to their own culture, religion and linguistic community. The social worker needs to address children's problems, and this can only be done when the social worker assesses and gathers information regarding the children and their parents, in order to make decisions regarding the future of both the children and their parents. When there is a possibility of children being reunited with their parents the social worker will draw up a contract in which service delivery is discussed.

During the services delivered it is the social worker's primary objective to enable both children and their families to understand their problems and to facilitate change in order to encourage reunification. In order for the social worker to establish whether it is possible for the children to be reunited with their parents a questionnaire as presented in table 3.1 can be utilized to assess the social functioning of both children and their parents.

This will give the social worker the necessary information to make an informed decision regarding the possibility of reunification. The role of the social worker has been discussed in the foster care and reconstruction process in Chapter 3. The next chapter will focus on foster care and reconstruction from the perspective of the social developmental approach.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FOSTER CARE, RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES AND THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In South Africa there has been a shift in the delivery of foster care and reconstruction services where the social development and strengths perspectives have become the norm guiding social workers to engage in a range of interventions stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004). The social development and strengths perspectives are aimed at improving the quality of life of vulnerable people, and including poor children and their families in South Africa as stipulated in the above-mentioned documents (Ansell, 2005:1).

The mandate for developmental social services is contained in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) as well as in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004); Department of Social Development (2004a:5), which will be discussed in this chapter in the process of explaining the delivery of social welfare services from a developmental approach in this chapter.

#### **4.2 THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE**

The South African government and Social Welfare division made a commitment to transform social welfare services within the context of transformation as outlined in policy documents such as the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997; Lombard & Klein, 2006:213).

This transformation of the social welfare services required a calculated shift from a residual welfare system to a developmental approach where social welfare is intended to be more equitable, participatory and suitable in meeting the needs of all South Africans. Social welfare services should be more responsive and accessible to address

the needs of the vast majority of the population in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2004:5).

As a new approach to social service delivery, social development goes beyond the residual approach that has governed social welfare approaches in the past. The social development approach aims at collective empowerment, facilitating processes that help all the poor, vulnerable and marginalized to regain control over their lives ([www.SouthAfrica.socdev.gov.za/Departmentsocialdevelopment.htm](http://www.SouthAfrica.socdev.gov.za/Departmentsocialdevelopment.htm)).

According to Nefdt (2003:29) the social development approach of welfare services is distinguished from the residual model through its focus on an all-inclusive and universal approach to social development. The social development theory holds that a self-motivated process of transformation and progress should occur. Social workers should thus during the process of reconstruction and foster care services ensure that both foster children and biological parents have the opportunity to manage and control their own processes of change in order to address the problems that led to their family's initial disintegration.

It can be concluded that both the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model's (2004) emphasize a shift from a residual welfare system where services are individualistic to a more accessible welfare system and providing a welfare system where the needs of all vulnerable and marginalized South Africans are met. The shift away from the residual welfare system aims to enable all South Africans to participate in the decision-making process in welfare service delivery in an attempt to regain control over their lives. Biological parents thus have the ability to be dynamic participants in changing their own lives, improving their chances of being reunited with their children after statutory removal.

The transformation from the residual welfare system to a more developmental system was adopted in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) to assist the transformation of social service delivery towards a more developmental approach.

The goal of the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) will be discussed in the following section including the principles set out in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), guiding social workers in the delivery of reconstruction and foster care services from a developmental approach.

#### **4.3 THE WHITE PAPER FOR SOCIAL WELFARE'S PERSPECTIVE ON DEVELOPMENT**

Moving towards a developmental approach South Africa adopted the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) as mentioned above. This committed the Department of Social Services to a social developmental paradigm in social welfare service delivery. The developmental approach was distinguished as supporting a people-centred approach to social and economic development. The developmental approach focuses on the “maximization of human potential and on fostering self-reliance and participation in decision-making”. It also stresses services that are family orientated to emphasize the importance of foster children returning to their biological parents as soon as the family is capable of functioning on an optimum level in society.

It can be concluded that the developmental approach as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) aims to deliver social services where clients are enabled to increase control over their lives whilst developing clients' potential, skills and knowledge to enhance their own development.

According to Midgley (1995) the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) promotes the development of an integrated and comprehensive system of social service delivery. The social developmental approach is seen as being a process of planned social change, designed to promote the well being-of the population as a whole.

According to Koopman (2003:36) the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) promotes the development of an

integrated and comprehensive system of social service delivery with the restructuring of social welfare services in South Africa. In focusing on the reorganization of the welfare delivery system, a wide-ranging, general and integrated delivery of services are thus proposed. Social workers thus need to deliver comprehensive social welfare services with service delivery during foster care and reconstruction services being efficient, effective and quality driven to enhance the self-reliance of both foster children and their biological parents.

The goal of the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) is to render developmental social welfare services. Mullagee (2005:6-7) explains that this entails: “providing a humane, peaceful, just and caring society which will uphold welfare rights, facilitate the meeting of basic needs, release people’s creative energies, help them achieve their aspirations, build human capacity and self-reliance and participate fully in all spheres of social, economic and political life”.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) focuses on a welfare delivery system where a balance will be achieved between rehabilitative, protective, preventative and developmental interventions.

Of importance is Eade, cited in Kleijn, (2004) who states that development is about people becoming empowered to bring positive changes in their lives and about the realization of human potential and strengths through social and economic justice. Above all, it is about the process of transforming the lives of the vulnerable children and their parents.

It seems that the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) is aimed at transforming the delivery of social welfare services from a residual to a more developmental approach, towards the improvement of the social functioning of people.

The developmental approach aims to improve the role performance of foster children and their biological parents at all the different levels of their functioning in society. Foster children and their biological parents are encouraged to interact with one another, and with families, groups and communities in their environment.

In an attempt to transform the lives of the vulnerable children and their parents principles are set out in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) to guide social workers in the delivery of social welfare services from a developmental perspective.

#### **4.3.1 Principles of the White Paper for Social Welfare**

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) set out principles to guide social workers and helpers in the delivery of social welfare services. In the next section an explanation will be given of these principles which guide social workers in their delivery of foster care and reconstruction services according to the development approach.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) put forward the following principles that should guide all social workers when deciding on a specific placement for children in need of care:

- “Basic welfare rights should be secured, hence creating an environment suited for the achievement of every citizen’s right to social security and social welfare services.
- Non-discrimination, acceptance and respect for diversity should be demonstrated when deciding on a home for children.
- Programmes and delivering services should be designed in a way that is compatible with human rights and fundamental freedom as expressed in the Constitution.
- Social welfare programmes should be appropriate and responsive to the range of cultural, social and economic conditions in communities” (Streak, 2005:12).

The above principles should be followed by social workers in the choice of foster home. When social workers decide on a foster care placement children’s religion, age and culture should be similar to those of the foster parents, providing an appropriate home and according to the child’s unique identity. The environment should be suited to the normal development of children, where their diversity is respected and they have an opportunity to be cared for in a safe, stable home.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) identifies two branches of welfare delivery: social security and social welfare services. It defines the social security aspect as covering a wide variety of public and private measures that provide cash or in-kind benefits or both in order to support children financially.

Social welfare's second branch of welfare delivery is defined as all the facilities, programmes and services that are part of the proposed developmental social welfare system, organized by social development departments and do not fall within the category of social services defined as social security (Streak, 2005:10-11). The specific social welfare services delivered to foster children and their biological parents are stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Social welfare services facilitated by the social worker include the choice of foster home, respecting children's human rights and strengthening the family life of foster children and their biological parents. Social welfare services rendered to foster children will now be discussed within the context of developmental social welfare services.

#### **4.3.1.1 *Choice of foster home***

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) stipulates that the principle of appropriateness should be adhered to in the choice of a foster home and children's culture and age should be respected. When social workers decide on foster care placements it is imperative that they respect children's cultural and social background. Respect for culture will be discussed in the following section.

- **Culture**

Children come from diverse backgrounds where different cultures, beliefs, traditions and values are practiced. It is thus essential that social workers at all times should show respect and understanding of the children's present needs regarding their cultural context (Donkoh, 2000:5).



According to Hepworth and Larson (1999) when social workers communicate with people from a different culture they need to be sensitive and open to the cultural differences and willing to acquire knowledge of their clients' unique culture. The social worker should thus in the choice of foster home respect and accept both the strengths and different dynamics of foster children's cultures.

- **Age**

When placing children in foster care it is also essential to take the age of the children into consideration. Crea (2007:142-156) explains that younger children can more readily adapt and adjust to the foster placement as they are likely to have had fewer negative life experiences. However they may need more attention, assistance and general encouragement whilst in foster care. Social workers thus have a responsibility to make sure that the choice of foster parents is appropriate to provide for the age-specific needs of children.

Especially in cases where children are placed with very young foster parents, the social worker needs to be sure that the foster parents have the time and energy to assist the young children with their daily needs, problems and challenges. Older children also have their own challenges in foster care. They have been identified as more likely to have placement breakdowns due to the possibility of more exposure to unfavourable events, thus experiencing more problems during the placement. Social workers have a responsibility to render more intensive reconstruction services to older children in an attempt to avoid placement breakdown which could possibly lead to a delay in reunification with their biological parents (Brown, 2006:1498-1506.) Respect for the children's age is thus of vital importance when the choice of foster home is made.

As stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) the social worker needs to ensure that conditions in the new home will be conducive to support and promote positive changes in children.

When the age differences between the children and their new foster parents are great the children and foster parents will be challenged to come to an agreement about a workable relationship and the foster care placement will be daunting to the children's

development (Fraser, 1996:356). When the social worker decides on the placement for children it is a decision made more complex by, the age of the children, which is an important factor determining the positive progression of children in foster care.

Paniagua (2001:2) is of the opinion that social workers attempt to place children in an environment suitable to their background, but most times they do not assess or gather enough information from the families in their prospective choice of foster placement. The importance of the information regarding the foster parents will be discussed in the following section.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Respect for children's human rights***

According to Potgieter (1998:69) developmental social welfare services are based on a philosophy underlying human rights as expressed in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 200 of 1993). According to Taylor (1994:3-5) developmental social welfare emphasizes the basic social welfare rights of all South Africans through the establishment of a democratically determined, impartial, just and effective social delivery system. These fundamental rights include the government's attempt to create conditions favourable for growth and development to facilitate every citizen's right to social welfare services through the maintenance of public and private welfare services. It aims to serve all groups and sections of society and respects the diversity of the population and in particular children and their families in need of care. It can be concluded that social welfare services should be appropriate and acceptable to those whom it is supposed to serve (Potgieter, 1998:121).

- **Assessing prospective foster families**

Social workers need to deliver a service which is congruent with the human rights of children as stipulated in the Constitution. Children should only be placed with foster parents when the social worker has assessed the prospective foster families' circumstances and confirmed their ability to take care of the foster children (Morrison, 2007:142-149).

Information is needed regarding the foster family's personal characteristics and habits, financial well-being, safety and appropriateness of the home setting and neighbourhood as well as an overall prediction that the children would find security and love during the duration of their placement in foster care. Social workers should assess the new foster families' circumstances and make sure that their level of fitness to serve as foster parents is appropriate (Morrison, 2007:142-149).

- **Similar background**

The following factors need to be taken into account by family care organizations in the choice of suitable foster parents. Foster parents should practice a religion similar to that of the children and their environment should be similar to that of the biological parents (Barker, 2004:11). Facilitating the placement of children in an environment according to the needs of the children as well as the principles stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) is essential. The social worker should at all times make sure the diversity of clients is respected, especially regarding their culture. When the children and the foster parents do not agree on cultural beliefs, traditions or values it could lead directly to a placement breakdown, delaying reunification.

The choice in parents is crucial in providing the children for the duration of the foster care placement with parents who not only want to take care of and assist them in their development, but at the same time have the ability to provide for their basic needs.

It is clear that the choices made regarding the placement should not be made hastily and that social workers have a responsibility to carefully assess the foster parent's home setting.

According to Whittaker (2002:11-12) social workers have a very important responsibility when choosing foster care placements. The children's age and culture are guiding factors, and the social workers need to adhere to the human rights of children set out in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). This will optimize the children's right to development in an appropriate environment where the chances of succeeding are encouraged because of concerns for

maintaining cultural and age continuity in the choice of foster care placement. Another important goal of the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) refers to the strengthening of family life which will be discussed in the following section.

#### ***4.3.1.3 Strengthening of family life***

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) stresses the importance of strengthening the biological family in promoting family reunification by implementing the empowerment approach, focusing on foster children and their biological parents strengths, ensuring contact between foster children and their biological parents, supporting the family by identifying emotional, physical and social support, identifying the families' strengths, recognizing the families' capacity for growth and involving the family to participate in formulizing their own goals to be reached in the foster care process.

#### ***4.3.1.4 Contact between children and their biological parents***

The family bond is further strengthened through maintaining the children's bond and involvement with their families. Social workers have to assist the families in continuous contact as a method of ensuring that the family members stay involved and support each other in the process of resolving problems, conflict or deficits. Social workers must ensure that the children are placed in such a way that it is possible for the biological parents to continue making contact.

A factor that strongly affects the pattern of contacts is the distance between the biological parents and the foster parents. In situations where the distance between the parents and children is great and the income of the parents is generally low, they cannot afford to visit their children regularly. The contact between the children and their parents becomes weaker, with the result that the parent-child relationship is broken and the children are losing touch with their parents.

According to Brown (2006:1499-1508), the plan of action already drawn up with the removal of children from their biological parents should specify the services which will

be rendered to parents to once again take over the care of their children within a specified period. Most problems contributing to placement disruption leading to children spending longer periods in foster care is the lack of continuous influence of the parents. Social workers need to arrange for continuous visits between children and their parents, as discussed in the plan and contract. In many cases these visits could be highly stressful to both the foster children and their parents, hence the importance of the social worker to enable the clients to understand and deal with their feelings of anger, anxiety and possible confusion. The involvement of the biological parents while the children reside in foster care has been considered important by child welfare professionals to ensure family continuity and stability, and variables such as parental visiting patterns, parent-child attachment, and parental service involvement. According to James (2002:238) it has been found, for instance, that parent-child visitations are associated with higher rates of reunification. The Child Care Act (No 74 of 1983) requires the social worker monitoring the placement, to assist the biological parents to remain in contact with their children and to work towards the return of the children to their parents care, if this is possible.

The conclusion can thus be made that the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) sets out principles such as ensuring the basic welfare rights; non-discrimination, acceptance and respect for diversity; delivering and designing programmes in a way compatible with human rights and delivering social welfare programmes appropriate and responsive to cultural, social and economic conditions of children, biological parents and foster families.

These principles ensure that social workers are well guided when deciding on a specific placement for children in need of care.

In the delivery of social welfare services from a developmental perspective it is necessary to include the fundamental values of the Integrated Social Service Delivery Model (2004) and the principles as stipulated in this model to enable social workers to deliver developmental social welfare services. The Integrated Social Service Delivery Model's (2004) principles guiding social workers in developmental social welfare services will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4.4 THE SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL**

The Integrated Social Service Delivery Model (2004) describes the nature, extent and level of services in the developmental social services sector, excluding social security. The document emphasizes the need for a developmental approach to social welfare services. It also states that all programmes in the social development category are intended to work in an integrated way aimed at addressing the social welfare and developmental needs of target groups (National Department of Social Development, 2004c:16).

- **Target Groups**

For the purpose of the study the target groups in need of social welfare services include those children and their families in South Africa who are vulnerable because of abuse and/or neglect. The Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004) states that delivery of services are successful when children and their biological families have entered and exited the system and are able to function maximally within a vulnerable family unit.

In other words, the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004) aims to deliver social welfare services in a developmental and integrated way to address the needs of vulnerable target groups including foster children and their biological parents.

- **Classification of welfare service delivery**

The Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004) provides the necessary classification of welfare service delivery regarding services provided under the Department of Social Services. Social work services are delivered on different levels of intervention to children and their families during foster care. In order to achieve the desired outcome, namely an improvement in children and their families social functioning, services should be rendered at different levels in all cases of statutory removal. These levels are on a continuum, so while they may seem to follow a distinct hierarchy, a client may enter at any of the levels, and the levels may overlap in practice.

The social worker providing the service and client must together establish the client's social functioning and develop an intervention approach that will enable the client to

reach the optimal level of social functioning, as well as to be ready for reintegration into society. The different levels of intervention are as follows: Prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention, reconstruction and aftercare. Reconstruction and aftercare are primary focal points in the intervention process stipulated in the document. In terms of the services delivered during foster care the document focuses on the delivery of rehabilitation and a variety of services in the continuum of care. Intervention services encourage rehabilitation to promote the reunification of children with their families, helping to ensure that alternative care becomes a provisional measure and that the children involved are fully integrated into their families if possible.

Social workers have the responsibility to deliver reconstruction and aftercare services in accordance with the specific needs of the children and their families, to ensure their needs are met and that parents improve their ability to care for their children.

- **Rehabilitation services**

The objective of rehabilitation services is to improve the social functioning of clients whose functioning is impaired as a result of abandonment, abuse, neglect or any persistent condition including poverty. Services delivered at this level encourage social workers to deliver support services to foster children and their biological parents to enhance their self-reliance and optimal social functioning.

Rehabilitation services are delivered in a wide range of settings, including home, service agencies and residential facilities in order to maintain or improve the physical, social and psychological well-being of individuals. The goal is to improve their independence and quality of life (Streak, 2005:24-25).

Social workers thus identify needs and problems that affect the social functioning of foster children and their biological parents after assessment and development of an intervention programme and facilitate the intervention process that might resolve or minimize their problems. The profession focuses on conditions that disturb the relationship between people and their environment, tries to restore them to a previous level of functioning, or helps them to adjust to the challenges they are facing.

It aims to identify the system in need and to provide understanding and support from its environment or facilitate changes in that environment. It helps the clients to cope and assists them in maintaining, promoting or restoring their social functioning. Assisting the clients to resolve their problems aims to enhance the clients' capacity to achieve their own desired level of social functioning where the clients are not passive recipients of services, but participate and develop their own treatment goals.

According to Streak (2005:24-25) the core values inherent in the developmental approach refer to the “acknowledgement of and respect for people’s potential to develop and change, recognition of the rights of all to participate in their own development and decision making and to be accountable for their own lives as well as commitment to facilitate social processes that build effective relationships and healthy organizations and communities”.

The developmental approach is implemented to ensure that people have the ability to change whilst participating and directing their own process of growth and development. There are however more specific principles set out in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004).

- **Principles**

The following principles are regarded as key principles in a developmental approach relevant to the South African context.

- “Participation: People should be fully engaged in their own process of learning, growth and change, starting from where they are and moving at their own pace.
- Self-reliance: People should be connected to one another and with their environment in ways that make them more effective in their individual and collective efforts towards a better life, developing leadership, decision-making and planning skills, among other things.
- Empowerment: Power relations should shift towards people achieving greater control and influence over decisions and resources that impact on the quality of their lives through increasingly interdependent relationships.



- Universal access: Social development services should be available to all vulnerable groups. No individual or group should be denied access either because of lack of resources or lack of knowledge of how to gain access to services.
- Equity: The disbursement of resources should be based on need, priorities and historical imbalances.
- Transparency: There should be access to information, and openness regarding administrative and management procedures.
- Appropriateness: There should be responsiveness to social, economic, cultural and political conditions.
- Accountability: All legislation, policy and regulations should be complied with.
- Accessibility: Accessibility in terms of physical and geographical conditions, time, language and need should be ensured.
- Efficiency and effectiveness: Objectives should be achieved in the most cost-effective manner.
- Partnership: It is the collective responsibility of government, civil society and the business sector to deliver services.
- Social integration: Policies and programmes should promote social justice.
- Sustainability: Long-term maintenance of desired goals should be possible”.

These principles underline the delivery of social services and should be observed and complied with by all social workers delivering social welfare services during foster care and reconstruction service delivery.

It can be concluded that the Integrated Service Delivery Model's (2004) principles are in accordance with the development perspective as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Clients need to participate in the process of growth and change, where social workers encourage the foster children and biological parents to be involved in the process of change. Clients must develop their self-reliance by connecting to one another, where both the foster children and their biological parents through communication and interaction make more effective decisions regarding their future, especially regarding the possibility of

reunification. Both foster children and biological parents should receive more control and influence over decision making, which impacts them in their daily lives, and these children and parents thus become empowered to take control of their lives, and enhance their independence.

Resources, social development services and information should at all times be available and distributed to these vulnerable children and their parents through being accessible, equitable and transparent to ensure that they receive the necessary services to assist them in the reunification process. In the service delivery process services should at all times be appropriate and there should be a consistency in the responsiveness to social, economic, cultural and political situations. Services should be accessible especially in terms of the language and culture of clients. Accountability is another important principle where all legislation, policy and regulations should be complied with whilst promoting social justice through policies and programmes to encourage social integration.

In order to improve the effectiveness of services social workers should try to achieve objectives in the most cost-effective manner whilst working together with other organizations in an attempt to improve partnerships.

Another important aspect is for social workers to deliver social services in a way that long-term maintenance of desired goals can be achieved and sustained. Services delivered to foster children and their biological parents must ensure that they remain reunited and the possibility of family disintegration is eliminated.

In the delivery of foster care and reconstruction services social welfare services include interventions in respect of children who are victims or at risk of abuse and/or neglect as well as foster care placements. Statutory social services are incorporated under social welfare services and are included in the policy shift to provide social welfare services within a developmental approach. The inclusion of statutory social services under the term social welfare services is in line with the stipulations in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997:56), to conceptualize and deliver all social services within an integrated and developmental paradigm. The next section will discuss the delivery of developmental statutory social welfare services.

#### **4.5 DEVELOPMENTAL STATUTORY SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES**

According to Lombard and Kleijn (2006:216) developmental statutory services are protection services aimed at providing in an integrated manner, all the fundamental social welfare services (including all those services required to address the needs and concerns which created and initiated the statutory process). Developmental statutory services thus address the needs of children and their families to improve their social functioning in relation to the demands created in their interaction with their environment. The ultimate objective of developmental statutory services is to preserve families. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Draft National Policy for Families (Department of Social Development, 2004b:73) indicates that the rationale of family preservation strategies is the belief that children and young people should remain with their families where they have the opportunity to develop in a family environment.

Family preservation “refers to a methodical determination of those families in which children could remain in their homes or be returned home safely, and provision of the services needed to ensure that safety”.

In the delivery of developmental statutory social services there is a shift from a residual, casework perspective to an integrated developmental paradigm, where social welfare services are delivered from a holistic perspective. The Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004) identifies the nature of developmental social welfare service delivery in promotion and prevention services, protection services, rehabilitation services and continuing care services. For the purpose of the study only protection services will be discussed.

Statutory services underpin protection services. From a protective perspective, statutory social services are delivered at all intervention levels (micro, mezzo and macro) and consists of a variety of intervention approaches extending from formal (statutory) intervention to rehabilitation, organizational change, social education and social action.

Within an integrated service delivery framework, statutory interventions cannot therefore be regarded or applied as isolated interventions. Streak and Poggenpoel (2005:6) emphasizes that the developmental approach to social welfare is a comprehensive

approach that encourage self-reliance and foster participation in decision-making at individual, family and community level. Services are aimed at supporting and strengthening the individual involved.

Another key feature of the delivery of developmental statutory social welfare services is the approach to social welfare views where the client is seen as a person with human rights and strengths, where the individual can resolve his/her own problems. Developmental statutory social services are embedded in a human rights approach and draw from strength and empowerment hypothesis and practice models such as social development, sustainable livelihoods and sustainable development (Streak & Poggenpoel, 2005:6).

Developmental statutory social services draw upon a service delivery framework, which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4.5.1 Service delivery framework for developmental statutory social services**

Social service delivery includes a comprehensive model of care that ranges from prevention to early intervention, statutory intervention and reconstruction and aftercare. According to Lombard and Kleijn (2006:218) this approach to statutory work includes any services to children, youths and their families. These services could be delivered at one or more of the service levels (early intervention and the continuum of care and development) and should ensure that special development areas are integrated where they are relevant to the participants.

In the delivery of statutory social welfare services the greatest challenge faced by social workers, is to shift from deficiency-based approaches and interventions to strength and empowerment approaches and strategies.

From a development perspective, social workers should inform clients of their rights to information, participation and decision-making in the process of foster care and reconstruction.

The rights of all children in South Africa are set out in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution (Act 108/1996) and in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the

Child (Streak & Poggenpoel, 2005:5). Children's views are sought and considered in all matters that affect their lives. The child and family have the right to know in what way statutory intervention will protect the child from harm (Lombard & Kleijn, 2006:213). Even in situations where children are removed due to an emergency the rights of the child and family to participate in decisions regarding the statutory process and the desired services should be respected.

Lombard and Kleijn (2006:220) state that a developmental approach to statutory social services will find and identify the strengths within the child and family that could work against the risk factors that require a statutory or formal protection intervention. Children form part of families and communities and it should be recognized that their rights and needs cannot be understood in isolation. Family strengths are usually made up of strengths of individual members as well as connections they have with one another and with people outside their family.

Based on the human rights perspective the affiliation with a client is one of mutual regard and cooperation. Both the clients and the social worker will focus and identify their own strengths and capabilities which are needed during the reconstruction and after-care level of service delivery. Reconstruction and aftercare service delivery looks beyond family deficits and focuses on family values namely the strengths and assets of the family, in order to encourage the family to change and improve their situation.

The strengthening of the family is achieved through social workers' delivery of services that encourage family reunification, where children should return to a safe and supportive home as soon as the problems that led to their initial removal are resolved. This encourages the family to rebuild their trust, strengthening attachments and re-establishing positive family processes and traditions by implementing the strengths perspective. The strengths perspective will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4.6 THE STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE**

Social services approaches from the pre-1994 era were condemned for not being appropriate or developmental and for creating a dependency in clients. Social services allowed clients to become completely dependent on the social worker for guidance,

support and advice regarding their development and change. Services were individualistic and were similar to a remedial model in which the focus was on the analysis and rehabilitation of the client, with the client being a submissive receiver of social welfare services.

The need therefore becomes apparent for a developmental approach based on the strengths of the individual, groups, or communities. The developmental approach was to be implemented where the client's strengths were explored and identified. In the strengths perspective a holistic vision of development is envisaged where clients are encouraged to use their knowledge, skills and expertise of their own situations to address their social and economic needs. The strengths perspective is thus utilized in ways that enhance the children and their parents' existing coping skills and sense of efficacy regarding their own situations (Green, 2004:327).

Social workers practicing from a strengths perspective facilitate the assessment, discovery, exploration and use of clients' strengths and resources enabling them to achieve their goals and realize their dreams (Lawrence, 2007:1). The social worker should assist clients to mobilize and organize their strengths in the process of achieving their goals and vision and simultaneously facilitating clients to have a better quality of life and on their own terms.

The development approach thus follows the strength perspective in that it shares the principles of inclusion and participation in decision making where the empowering of clients is a necessity in the delivery of developmental statutory social welfare services. Both foster children and biological parents have the ability to focus on their own strengths and resources to address and change the problems that led to the initial disintegration of the family. There are certain principles underlying the strengths perspective which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4.6.1 Principles fundamental to the strengths perspective**

According to Nefdt (2003:26) the principles fundamental to the strengths perspective are founded on regeneration and healing from within and dialogue and collaboration. These principles are in line with the democratic principles as outlined in the South

African White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and should be embraced in the delivery of developmental social welfare services in South Africa by social workers.

- **Regeneration and healing from within**

The aim of this principle is that people have the strength and capability to heal from within. Given a considerate and helpful surrounding people can develop a sense of wellbeing through the formation of their own resources. People have intrinsic powers of transformation that are often overlooked by social organizations.

- **Dialogue and collaboration**

The principle holds that people can only come into being through an innovative affiliation with the outside world and with others. Without this communication and dealings, people would not be able to determine their own powers. Dialogue with others confirms the importance of the other people in their lives.

From the above, it is evident that through creative dialogue and collaboration with the community and other individuals such as the professional staff of the organization, planning and the delivery of social welfare services can become more effective. The strengths perspective urges social welfare practitioners towards a different attitude about the profession and those with whom they work.

The shift is away from social workers teaching foster children and biological parents the power of knowledge, to a perspective where social workers are working in collaboration with the power within the individual towards a life that is better on the client's own terms.

It can be concluded that the strengths perspective holds that foster children and their biological parents have the power and ability to heal from within utilizing their own resources and strengths. The social worker thus have to be aware during the delivery of social welfare services of the innate ability of both foster children and biological parents to change, grow and develop their own ways in order to change the problems that led to the family's disintegration.

Focusing on dialogue and collaboration in the strengths perspective allows the social worker to work together with foster children and biological parents, focusing on the knowledge and skills of the individuals mentioned above instead of only concentrating on the social worker's power and knowledge.

The shift in identifying the strengths, knowledge and power of both foster children and biological parents thus allows the social worker to focus on the inherent strengths of foster children and biological parents to identify, cope with and change their own problems and adversities.

In the implementation of the strengths perspective the social worker will have a specific approach when contacting the client, conducting an assessment, providing intervention, leading to evaluation and the implementation of the termination phase. The social worker needs to identify the strong and positive aspects of the parent-child relationship as well as its weak and negative side.

This creates a balanced view of the parents' capacity to provide adequate care and their potential to make whatever changes necessary to meet this need in the future (Barker, 2004:71-73). When social workers assess children and their families' strengths during the assessment phase in foster care, the focal point should include personality traits and behaviour of both the children and their biological parents (integrity, determination, optimism, warmth and consideration for each other); interaction with the environment (dependability as a member of staff, loving parents); communication ability (ability to listen conscientiously, share feelings, express oneself); coping mechanisms (flexibility, ability to challenge problems, collaboration); social skills (assertiveness, show consideration, and receptiveness) (Saleeby, 2003:1).

Utilizing the strengths perspective the social worker not only identifies the children and families' resources, but at the same time helps them achieve their goals in line with their personal aspirations, capabilities and aspirations of a possible reunification. Social workers accept the client's problems without over-identifying with it (Potgieter, 1998:143-144). According to Koopman (2003:23) the utilization of the strengths perspective can enhance the motivation of the clients.



If the social worker focuses on the problems, weaknesses, failures and deficits in the assessment of the client, it leaves the client feeling depressed and disconsolate. Focusing on the client's strengths during the assessment could motivate the client to do more for himself. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) further emphasizes the importance of empowering families and focusing on their strengths instead of their problems to facilitate reunification. Families know their problems, they are often just unable to find suitable ways of changing their deficits. The social worker has to assess the clients' strengths, focusing on their innate abilities.

Once these abilities are identified it is possible through reconstruction services to explore the possibility of external resources in the community. These resources can develop into opportunities for the clients to improve their own functioning.

The strengths perspective builds intervention on strengths and de-emphasizes problems. According to Weick (2000:351) the effect of a problem-centred focus is to weaken people's confidence in their ability to develop in self-reflective ways, believing that they are incapable of resolving their own problems. Social workers plan interventions during the planning phase to be developmental, not problem-focused. They are based on discovering and building on the individual and collective strengths of the children and their families (Morrison, 2007:5-8).

Early (2001:118-123) points out that social workers need to be aware during the assessment and planning of intervention during the foster process of the capacity for growth and change of the client system. Individuals and families all have many capabilities and strengths, also the capability to resolve their problems.

Another important principle fundamental in the strengths perspective is that of empowerment. The empowerment of both foster children and their biological parents will be discussed in the following section.

## **4.7 EMPOWERMENT**

The empowerment model allows social workers to convey a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility for meeting family needs and resolving troubles, encouraging decision making by the client and promoting the family's use of their own resources. This allows children and their parents to be more competent and self-sustaining (Franze, 2002:257-258).

Empowerment is a guideline stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), giving social workers the responsibility to direct their services to the vulnerable, poor and historically exploited as stipulated in the government's social development perspective.

Empowerment relies on the principle that each young person and his/her family have their own resourcefulness which should be promoted by providing opportunities to use and build their own support networks and to act on their choices and create a sense of responsibility.

According to Nefdt (2003:27) the empowerment principle holds that every individual has an intrinsic power and that the empowerment agenda should discover the power within people.

Contexts should be created for people to express their opinions, allowing them to make their own decisions. The necessity for empowerment is often essential for those vulnerable and excluded people, including foster children and biological parents. The empowerment agenda requires recognition that people have the capacity to participate in decisions and actions that define their world.

Nefdt (2003:70) states that in the empowerment approach people should be empowered with appropriate skills that will allow them to accept responsibility for the achievement of their development. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) describes empowerment as being the full participation of people in the formulation, completion and assessment of decisions determining the performance and wellbeing of society.

The shift towards an empowering practice requires changing the traditional oppressive structures, reducing bureaucracies and removing the power structures within organizations. The empowerment process should be associated with a process of capacity building if the objective is to allocate power and include people in participation and decision-making processes.

It can be concluded that social workers have the responsibility to empower biological parents by facilitating various skills programmes to enable biological parents to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to improve their parenting abilities, enabling parents to take control of their ability to be positive role models for their children.

The social worker has the responsibility to provide both the foster children and their biological parents with an environment where opportunities are created for them to make their own decisions and enhance their sense of responsibility.

In order for social workers to deliver social welfare services during foster care and reconstruction services according to the developmental perspective as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004) it is necessary that an enabling environment for developmental statutory social services should be created.

The next section will discuss the challenges that need to be addressed in providing an environment conducive to delivering social welfare services according to the developmental model.

#### **4.8 CHALLENGES SOCIAL WORKERS FACE IN DELIVERING DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL SERVICES**

The developmental perspective requires a paradigm shift and change of attitude amongst social workers. Social workers who are currently delivering foster care and reconstruction services in the same way as before the adoption of the developmental approach in 1997 are still providing these services according to the residual social welfare approach.

Social workers have the responsibility to change their way of delivering social welfare services, where delivering services according to the strengths and empowerment perspective is a necessity enabling the significant shift towards the development model.

The second challenge that needs to be addressed is the responsibility of social workers delivering social welfare services in foster care and reconstruction delivery to identify clear guidelines for what “integrated statutory services” entail. Social workers thus need to identify the specific integrated statutory services to be directed at the individual and the family in the process of reconstruction and foster care service delivery.

These guidelines should incorporate clear directions with regard to the levels of service delivery, the fundamental social services as well as how the implementation of integration social services will be monitored and evaluated to indicate that children and their biological parents are prepared for reunification.

According to Lombard and Kleijn (2006:228-230) the guidelines should include at least the following:

- “The protection of human rights, the rights of the child and family with regard to participation in protection decisions and processes;
- Participation strategies for engaging families and communities in decisions and activities;
- Addressing the fundamental causes of family disintegration;
- Respect for social and cultural contexts of children and families when placement out of home is considered;
- The fostering of self-reliance, capacity building and empowerment of at-risk families due to causes of children and families being at risk;
- Partnerships between government and NGOs, service providers and relevant role players within the community, including business and community structures such as schools and religious organizations;
- Integration of core services within the social service delivery framework of statutory intervention and prevention and early intervention within the context of reconstruction and after-care”.

It seems that the delivery of integrated social services is embedded in the protection of human rights where the child and family are involved in the process of decision making in foster care and reconstruction service delivery. The involvement of clients in the process of social service delivery allows them to take control of their lives, making decisions that will influence their ability to be reunited with their children. Social workers have the responsibility to address the fundamental causes of the family's disintegration to enhance both the children and their parents' chances to be reunited, whilst delivering intervention services fostering self-reliance, capacity building and empowerment.

It can thus be concluded that there has been a shift in the delivery of social welfare services from a residual system to a more developmental model. The developmental model aims to acknowledge and respect people's potential to develop and change with the assistance of the social worker. The social worker should ensure that both foster children and biological parents receive sufficient opportunities to utilize their own strengths, increasing their ability to take control over their lives through empowering themselves. Social workers also have the responsibility to enhance both foster children and biological parents' knowledge and skills to facilitate empowerment. The developmental model further emphasizes the rights of foster children and their biological parents to participate in their own development and decision making, improving their ability to be accountable for their own lives.

In order for the developmental model to be implemented in practice it is important for social workers to specify the specific integration social services which will be delivered as well as how the services will be monitored and evaluated. Only in situations where social workers clearly identify which integrated social services will be rendered will it be possible for foster children and biological parents to be aware of their responsibilities to enhance their possibility of reunification.

The shift from a residual model of social service delivery to a more developmental model is thus necessary to foster self-reliance with clients, where their strengths are emphasized and empowerment is facilitated.

It can be concluded that in order for the developmental model to be successfully implemented it is necessary for social workers to adhere to both the principles as set out in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004). Social workers also have the responsibility to change their delivery from a residual to a developmental model to ensure that both foster children and biological parents receive services in a more integrated and effective manner.

#### **4.9 SUMMARY**

It can be concluded that the delivery of foster care and reconstruction services according to the social development and strengths perspectives has become the norm in South Africa. Social workers should adhere to both the social development and strengths perspectives in the delivery of intervention services to clients. The shift in the delivery of intervention services will enable social workers to render services to foster children, biological parents and foster families where growth, change and progress are key principles assisting the poor, vulnerable and marginalized to regain control over their lives.

Principles of both the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004) should be adhered to by social workers, allowing social workers to encourage clients to be involved in the process of change. Social workers are thus delivering a service where the emphasis is placed on building clients' existing strengths, whilst at the same time empowering clients to identify and solve their problems, allowing foster children, biological parents and foster families to be more competent and self-sustaining.

The next chapter will focus on the empirical research component, where the current programmes delivered through social workers will be examined to develop a better understanding of the problems, challenges and needs of the social worker delivering foster and reconstruction services.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **AN OVERVIEW OF RECONSTRUCTION, SUPERVISION AND STATUTORY WORK**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Social workers remove children from their biological parents in terms of the Child Care Act 96 of 1996 and by means of an order of the children's court. The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 requires social workers to provide foster care with reconstruction services to ensure that foster children are reunited with their biological parents. According to Freundlich and Avery (2005:115-134) the reality in South Africa is that social workers remove children but do not have the resources, time or sufficient numbers of social workers delivering reconstruction services to sustain children's return to their biological parents.

The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how social workers render reconstruction services to contribute to the reunification process of foster children with their biological parents in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

One of the objectives of the study was to explore the process and procedures of statutory removal of children within the South African context in terms of the Act and how to describe the role of social workers in foster care and reconstruction service delivery.

This chapter describes the results of the study undertaken with twenty-one social workers in NGOs rendering child and family welfare services in the Strand, Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Kuils River and the Department of Social Services in Paarl. These results will now be discussed.

## 5.2 EMPIRICAL STUDY

The empirical study was undertaken and implemented as described in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Quantitative research is appropriate for the study to obtain facts and opinions about the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with biological parents. Quantitative research is also relevant because the goal of the study is to understand, rather than give explanations and predictions of human behaviour. This approach was well suited for realizing the goal of this study where emphasis is placed on describing the role of the social worker in the reunification process.

Qualitative research will also be used where the goal is to describe and understand, rather than to give an explanation and prediction of human behaviour. The researcher is interested in the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to an outsider perspective. This approach was well suited for realizing the goal of this study where the emphasis is placed on describing the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents.

According to De Vos et al. (2005:168) quantitative research will be used where a measurement instrument such as questionnaires will be utilized to gather data from respondents. According to Babbie and Mouton (2002:289) the use of a semi-structured questionnaire is effective where both open and close ended questionnaires are used to gather data in quantitative and qualitative research. The questionnaire (Annexure A) was divided into 15 sections.

Section one contains information about the identification details, section two on reconstruction and supervision services rendered, section three on reconstruction services in foster care, section four contains information about the social worker's role in the statutory removal process, section five the statutory intervention process, section six deals with the social work process in reconstruction service delivery and section seven includes services to foster families, biological parents and foster children.



Section eight refers to reconstruction services to biological parents, section nine deals with reconstruction service delivery to foster children, section ten with the nature of reconstruction services, section eleven contains information about foster care and reconstruction services rendered according to the social development and strengths perspectives, section twelve deals with poverty alleviation as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), section thirteen with the life cycle approach as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), section fourteen refers to the Services Delivery Model (2004) and section fifteen refers to the improvement of reconstruction services.

In the next section the research process will be explained briefly with regards to the selection of the population, sampling and data analysis.

### **5.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

The population according to De Vos et al. (2005:80) is a “set of entities to which all the measurements of interest to the practitioner or researcher are presented”. For the purpose of the study the population referred to social work in NGOs in the Western Cape where the social workers deliver reconstruction services to both the biological parents and foster children. To select a sample from the population, a non-probability sample using availability sampling was used. According to Alston and Bowles, (2003:88) using availability sampling gives social workers the chance to use a sample which is convenient and available.

There were twenty-one female social workers working in ACVV Strand, ACVV Stellenbosch, ACVV Somerset West, Badisa Kuils River, Badisa Strand and the Department of Social Services in Paarl who met the criteria for inclusion because of their availability regarding their close proximity to Stellenbosch, as described in Chapter 1.

#### **5.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Once the respondents are identified it is essential that they express their consent to participate in the research process, and they should be informed of their right to refusal and confidentiality. According to De Vos et al. (2005:69) possible ethical issues refer to prospective respondents giving informed consent. The researcher used both a consent form and the use of verbal agreements to request and confirm the voluntary participation of social workers. All twenty-one social workers agreed to participate in the research, answering questionnaires dealing with the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. An example of the written consent form is attached as Annexure B.

#### **5.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data captured by using the semi-structured questionnaires have to be analyzed. The researcher will reduce and analyze the data captured in quantitative research to an intelligent and interpretable form using the Microsoft Excel programme. The computer will be used to analyze and give information statistically using tables, graphs and charts. Qualitative data analysis is employed where data are analyzed using logic, theoretical and methodological principles rather than statistical formulae or quantification (Alston & Bowles, 2003:206-207). Both quantitative and qualitative data are presented in the form of tables, graphs and scales. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were obtained from all 21 female social workers working in foster care with both foster children, biological parents and foster families.

#### **5.6 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

The results of the research will be discussed using as a guideline table 5.1 which presents the contents covered in this study. The questionnaire will be used to guide the data offered and relevant literature will substantiate the findings.

**Table 5.1: A schematic table of the contents of the empirical study**

1. Identifying details:	
	-Age
	-Gender
	-Work experience regarding foster care
2. Reconstruction and supervision services rendered:	
	-Which services are you rendering?
	-What is your opinion regarding the number of social workers rendering services?
3. Reconstruction services in foster care:	
	-Are services enhancing the prompt return of children to their families?
	-Which factors contribute to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services?
4. The social worker's role in the statutory removal process:	
	-On which of the following is the emphasis placed when the different levels of prevention services are offered?
	-What is your opinion about the time and resources available during prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention?
5. Statutory intervention process:	
	-According to which of the following time frames are reunification services rendered to children and biological families?
6. The social work process in reconstruction service delivery:	
	-Which of the following tasks do you perform during the phases of the social work process?
	-After the termination phase, for which period of time are services to children and biological parents continued?

7. Services to foster families, biological parents and foster children:	
	-Which of the following services do social workers deliver during foster care and supervision?
8. Reconstruction services to biological parents:	
	-Which of the following services do social workers render during the reconstruction process as stipulated by order of the children's court?
	-According to which of the following time frames are reconstruction services rendered to children and their biological families by the organization?
9. Reconstruction service delivery to foster children:	
	-Which of the following services do social workers render to foster children?
	-Which of the following tasks in reconstruction do social workers perform as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983?
10.The nature of reconstruction services:	
	-In your opinion which of the following tasks are social workers performing during reconstruction social work services?
11.Foster care and reconstruction services rendered according to the social development and strengths perspectives:	
	-Which of the following principles stipulated in the White Paper for social work do you think social workers implement?

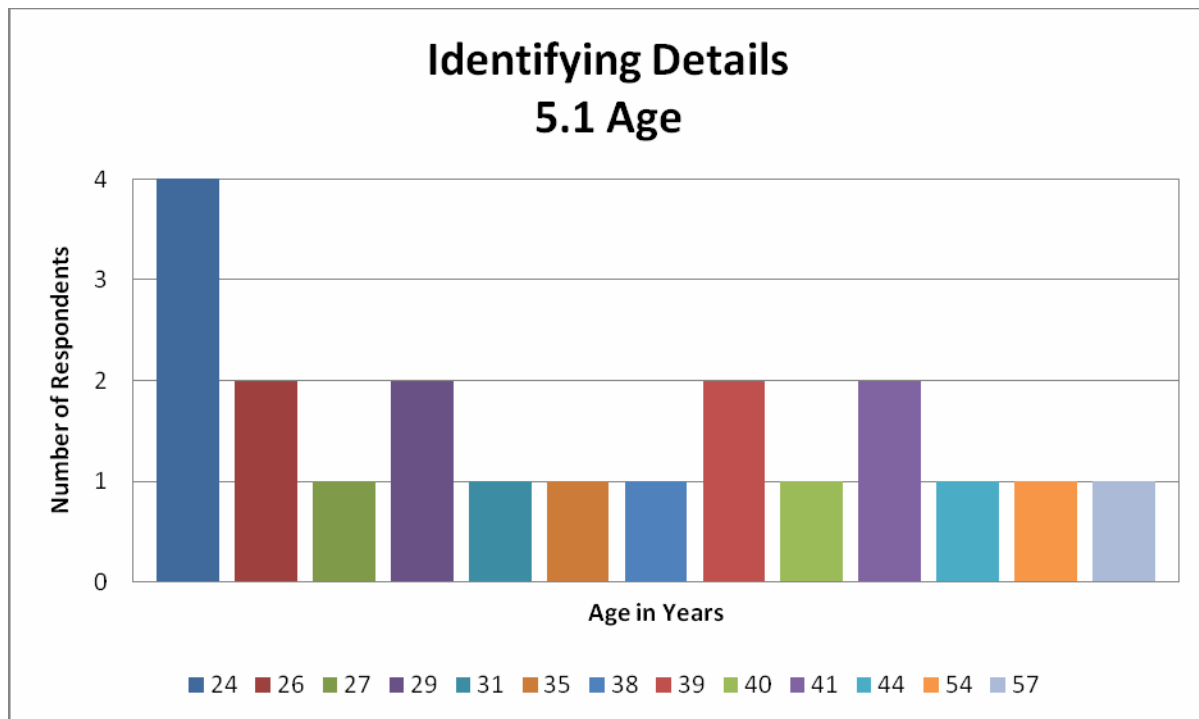
12. Poverty alleviation as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Work:	
	-In your opinion, which of the following can assist the biological parents in poverty eradication?
13. The life cycle approach as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Work:	
	-In your opinion which of the following changing needs of families are social workers able to address?
14. The Service Delivery Model (2004):	
	-Which of the following tasks do social workers deliver with regards to the development of parenting skills?
	-Which of the following social welfare services do social workers facilitate in the delivery of services to children?
15. Improvement of reconstruction services:	
	-In your opinion, which of the following reconstruction services can be improved?

### **5.6.1 Identifying details of social workers rendering services to foster children and biological parents in foster care**

The identifying details of the participants will now be discussed.

#### ***5.6.1.1 Age of social workers rendering reconstruction services in foster care***

The first factor that was investigated was the age of social workers rendering services to foster children and their biological parents in foster care. The distribution is reflected in Figure 5.1 below.



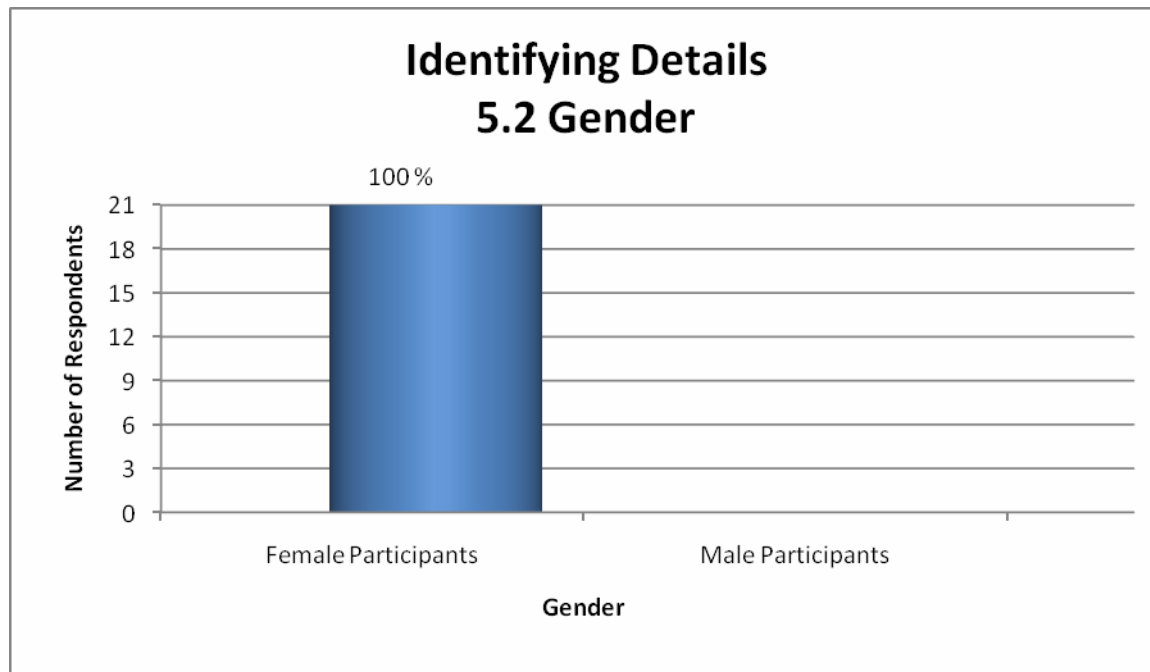
**Figure 5.1: Age of social workers rendering services in foster care**

Figure 5.1 shows that the majority of the respondents (4 or 19%) rendering services to foster children and their biological parents in the foster care process are 24 years old. There is an equal distribution between the age categories of 26; 29; 40 and 44, with 2 (or 10%) of the respondents in each category. The remainder are again equally distributed between the ages of 27; 31; 35; 38; 39; 41; 54 and 57, with one respondent (5%) in each category.

The ages are widely dispersed, covering a wide range from twenty-four to fifty-seven. From these findings it seems that social workers have an unequal amount of experience in foster care service delivery. Some of the social workers are very young and have a limited amount of experience, however some of them are already fifty-seven years old and thus have a vast amount of experience in the delivery of foster care services.

### **5.6.1.2 Gender of social workers rendering reconstruction services in foster care**

Another aspect that was investigated was the gender of social workers rendering reconstruction services to foster children and biological parents in foster care. The findings are presented in figure 5.2.



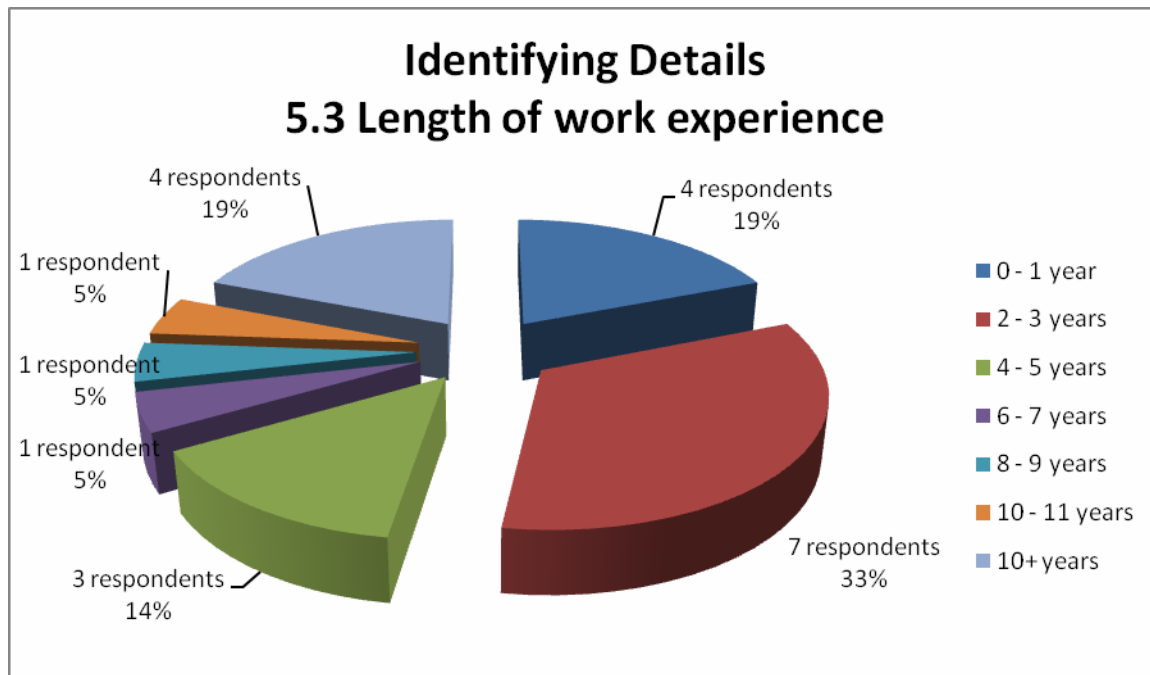
**Figure 5.2: Gender of social workers rendering reconstruction services in foster care**

Figure 5.2 shows that twenty-one of the respondents (100%) rendering reconstruction services in the foster care process are females. All the respondents in the sample rendering reconstruction and supervision services to foster children, biological parents and foster families are thus females.

### **5.6.1.3 Work experience regarding foster care service delivery**

The third factor that was investigated was the work experience of social workers regarding foster care delivery in an attempt to establish whether the respondents render foster care services in their organizations, which would allow them to participate in the

research. The figure below refers to the work experience of social workers delivering foster care services.



**Figure 5.3: Work experience of social workers in foster care**

Figure 5.3 shows that the majority (seven or 33%) of the respondents have worked for 2 to 3 years. There is an equal distribution between the categories of 0-1 and 10 years' work experience with four (19%) of the respondents in each category. Three (14%) have 4 to 5 years work experience. The remaining respondents yet again have an equal distribution between the categories of 6-7; 8-9 and 10-11 years' work experience with 1 (5%) of the respondents in each category.

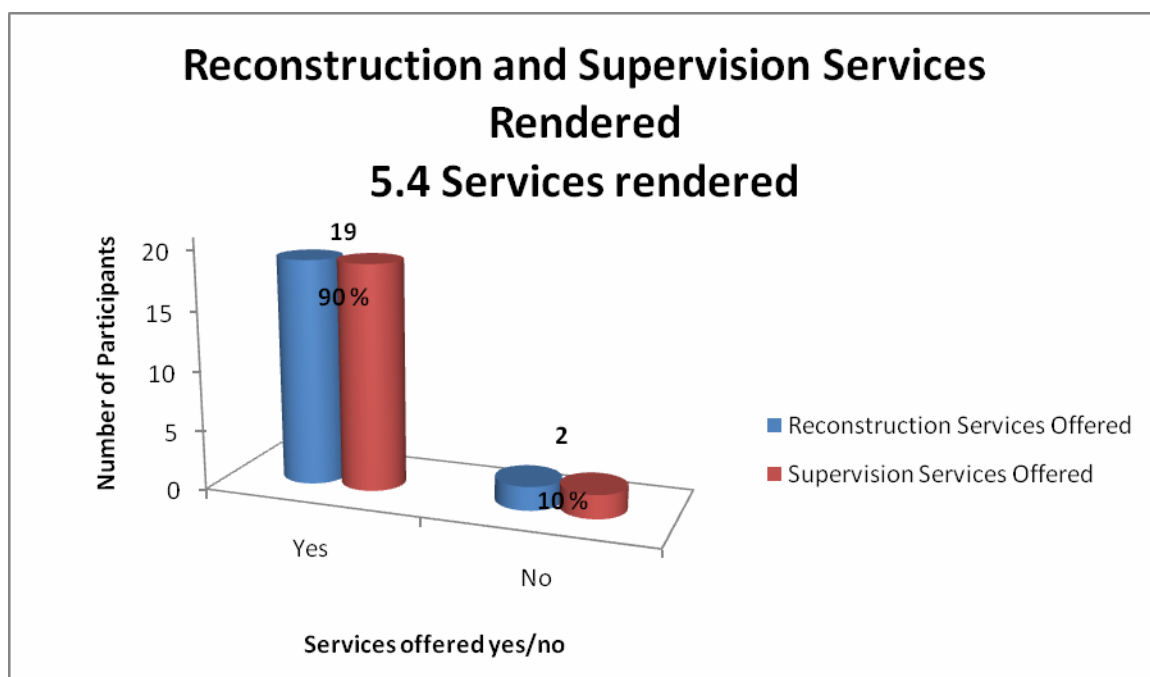
From these findings it seems that the majority of the social workers have a minimum of 2-3 years work experience in delivering foster care services. The work experience of social workers correlates with the already mentioned ages of social workers rendering foster care services, where according to their age social workers have the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver foster care services.



## 5.6.2 Reconstruction and supervision services rendered

### 5.6.2.1 Services rendered in organizations as part of foster care services to children and their biological parents

Respondents were asked whether they deliver reconstruction and supervision services as part of service delivery to foster children and their biological parents, seeing that both supervision and reconstruction service delivery are important in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. According to (2001:[http://www.SouthAfrica/newyork/social\\_welfare.html](http://www.SouthAfrica/newyork/social_welfare.html)) with the exclusion of cases in which children have been victims of abuse, a section of social workers' time and resources is aimed at the attainment of specific plans and reconstruction services. Reconstruction services are designed toward the delivery of programmes to encourage and facilitate reunification. The findings are presented in figure 5.4.



**Figure 5.4 Services rendered in your organization as part of foster care services to children and their biological parents**

Figure 5.4 shows that 19 respondents (90%) deliver both reconstruction and supervision services. This finding corresponds with Reich (2007:116-119), who explains that social

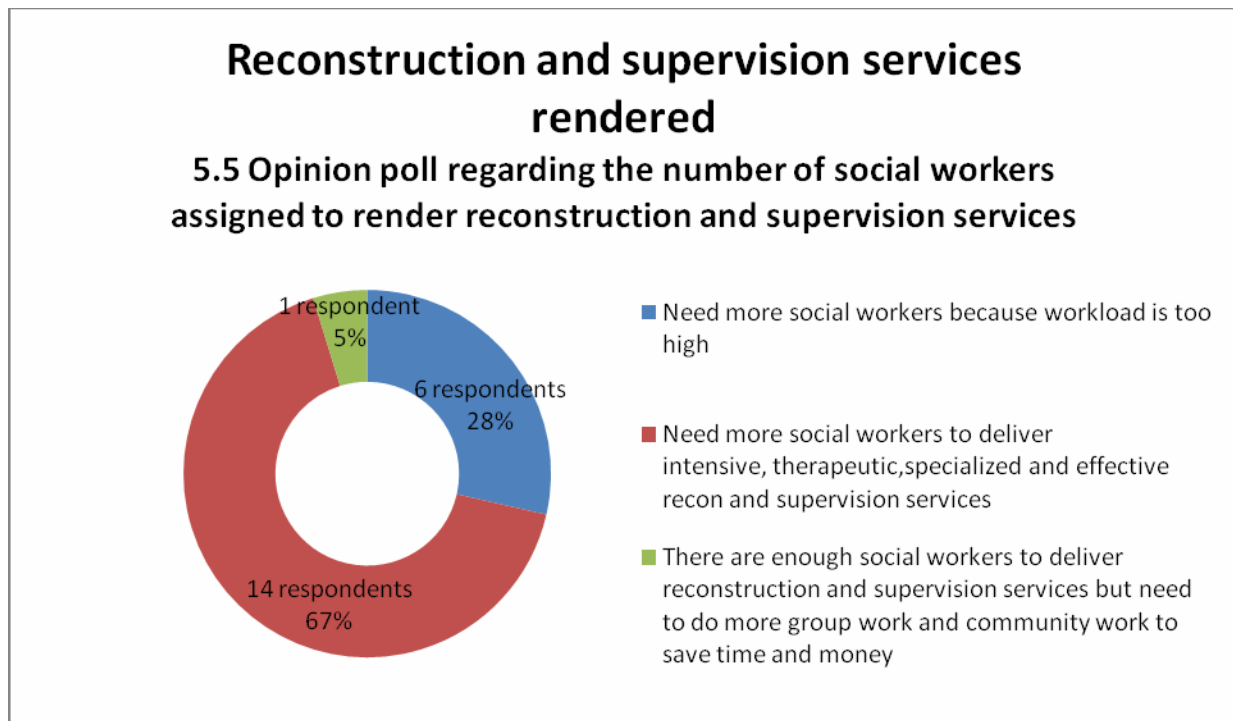
workers are the key facilitators in the reconstruction process, addressing both children and their families' problems in order to reunify children with their families while at the same time providing supervision services to foster families in an attempt to support them during the foster care process.

From the above findings it would appear that social workers working in foster care deliver both reconstruction and supervision services as part of foster care services to foster children, biological parents and foster families.

#### ***5.6.2.2 Situation analysis of social workers in organizations assigned to rendering services***

Another aspect that was investigated was the opinion of social workers regarding the number of social workers assigned to rendering reconstruction and supervision services. Eloff (1987:1) states that in view of the large number of children removed from parental care (the biological parents), and needing reconstruction services, the latter unmistakably form a key part of services in child welfare in South Africa, where social workers render services to both foster children and their parents. The findings are presented in figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5 shows that 14 (28%) of the respondents' opinion is that the number of social workers in South Africa rendering reconstruction and supervision services to foster children and biological parents is inadequate with regards to the heavy workload of social workers. Six (28%) of the respondents agreed that there are not enough social workers to deliver therapeutic and effective reconstruction and supervision services to foster children and biological parents. One of the respondents (5%) stated that there were enough social workers to deliver both reconstruction and foster care services, however, the focus of these services should be shifted to group work to save time and money. These findings correspond with Kleijn (2004:56) stating that social workers' inability to render effective reconstruction services is blamed on the limited capacity of social workers due to the insufficient number of social workers currently delivering reconstruction services.



**Figure 5.5 Number of social workers in your organization assigned to rendering reconstruction and supervision services**

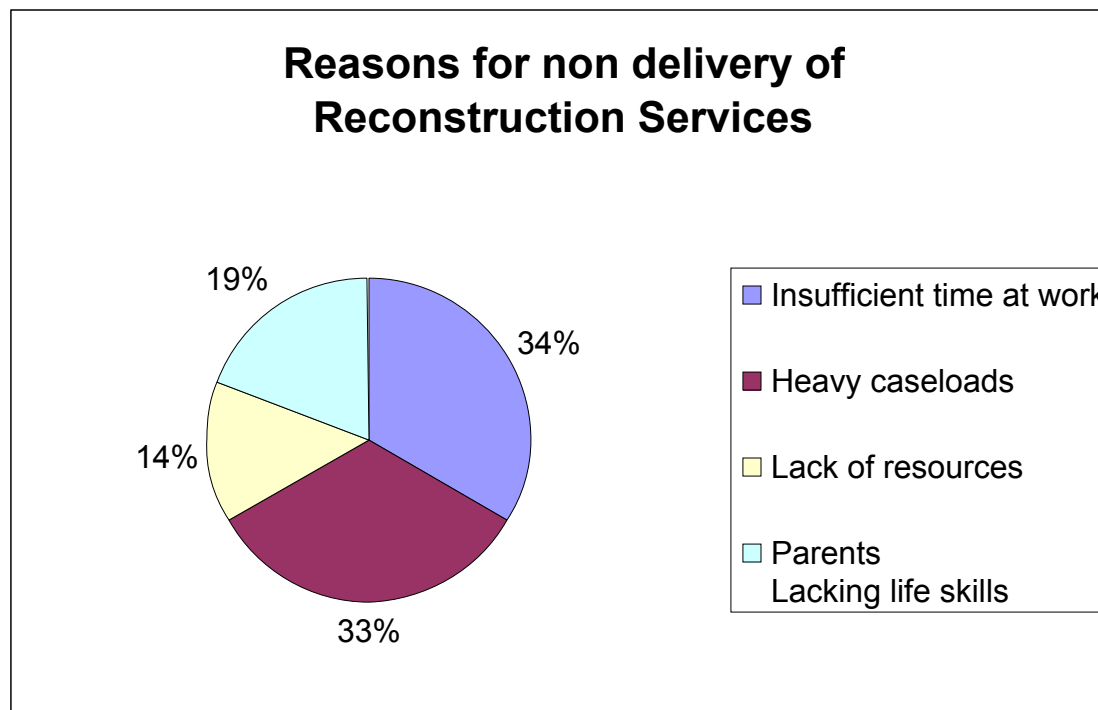
According to Kleijn (2004:145) services may be limited due to the number of families needing services far exceeding the capacity of the system. In conclusion, it can be stated that the number of social workers delivering both reconstruction and supervision services is insufficient and inadequate, with social workers believing that the heavy workload is detrimental to their delivery of therapeutic and effective reconstruction and supervision services.

### **5.6.3 Reconstruction services in foster care**

According to Lerwick (2002:23) between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of children placed outside their homes will return to their family homes. Social workers' perception of how reconstruction service delivery in the foster care process is enhancing the prompt return of children to their families in accordance with the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 is thus important when examining whether the current delivery of reconstruction services is effective in enhancing the reunification process.

### **5.6.3.1 Reconstruction service delivery enhancing the prompt return of children to their families in accordance with the Child Care Act 74 of 1983**

For the reason mentioned respondents were asked their opinions on reconstruction delivery enhancing reunification; the results are presented in figure 5.6.



**Figure 5.6 Reconstruction service delivery enhancing the prompt return of children to their families according to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983**

Figure 5.6 shows that there is an equal distribution of social workers' inability to deliver reconstruction services because of insufficient time and heavy caseloads, with seven (33%) of the respondents in each category believing that insufficient time and heavy caseloads have a negative impact on the return of children to their parents.

This finding corresponds with that of Moaisi (2003:20), that many children stay in foster care until 18 years and /or have completed secondary school, therefore staying in foster care for longer than the restricted time period of two years due to other claims on the social worker's time. This finding correlates with Lerwick's (2002:23) who states that the

heavy caseload of social workers inhibit them from rendering effecting and intensive reconstructions services.

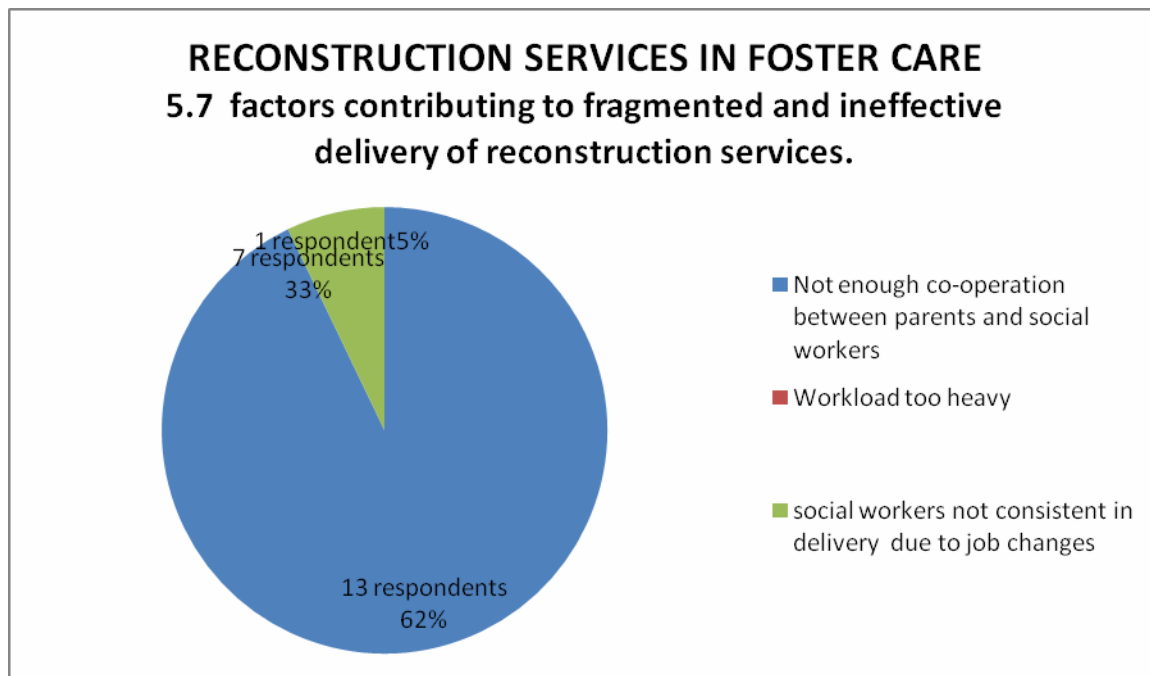
Fourteen (14%) of the respondents agreed that the lack of sufficient resources inhibits them from delivering reconstruction services. According to Freundlich and Avery (2005:115-134) the reality in South Africa is that social workers remove children but do not have the resources to deliver reconstruction services towards the children's return. The remaining four (19%) of the respondents stated that parents' lack of life skills prevent them from caring for their children. According to Lerwick (2002:23) to promote successful and enduring reunification stronger efforts should be made to strengthen families, and facilitate life skills programmes while children are in foster care. Providing sufficient reconstruction services will allow children and biological parent's to reunite as soon as possible.

The majority of the social workers thus agreed that the delivery of reconstruction services is currently not promoting the return of foster children to their families because of social workers' lack of time, heavy caseloads, not enough resources and parents lack of life skills preventing them from taking responsibility to care for their children.

#### ***5.6.3.2 Factors contributing to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services***

Respondents were asked which factors in their opinion led to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services. According to Moaisi (2003:2) the delivery of reconstruction services is fragmented and ineffective due to the lack of cooperation between organizations, leading to ineffective delivery of reconstruction services.

The question regarding which factors contributed to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services, was put to the respondents. The results are presented in figure 5.7.



**Figure 5.7 Factors contributing to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services**

Figure 5.7 shows that the majority of the respondents, 13 (62%) agreed that there is not enough co-operation between parents and social workers in the delivery of reconstruction services. Seven (33%) of the respondents agreed that the workload of social workers is too heavy. This leads to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services. The remaining one respondent (5%) felt that reconstruction services are inconsistent due to social workers' job changes.

The findings seem to be in conflict with the Financing Policy (1999) where it is stated that the key concept in the delivery of reconstruction services holds that social welfare agencies, where social workers deliver foster care and reconstruction services, are not the only ones responsible for intervening in these families' lives. For successful service delivery it is clear that foster care should be a shared responsibility between all professionals working with children. In fact, it has been noted that is detrimental when professionals avoid sharing responsibility, and work in isolation.

Relationships between families and agencies will improve and develop if social workers involved in different welfare agencies cooperate with one another. They will be able to make informed decisions regarding reconstruction services to be delivered. The White Paper for Social Welfare (1996:2-26) emphasizes that it is imperative for all professionals in all disciplines and within all agencies to work together to ensure services for children are properly coordinated and not fragmented and ineffective.

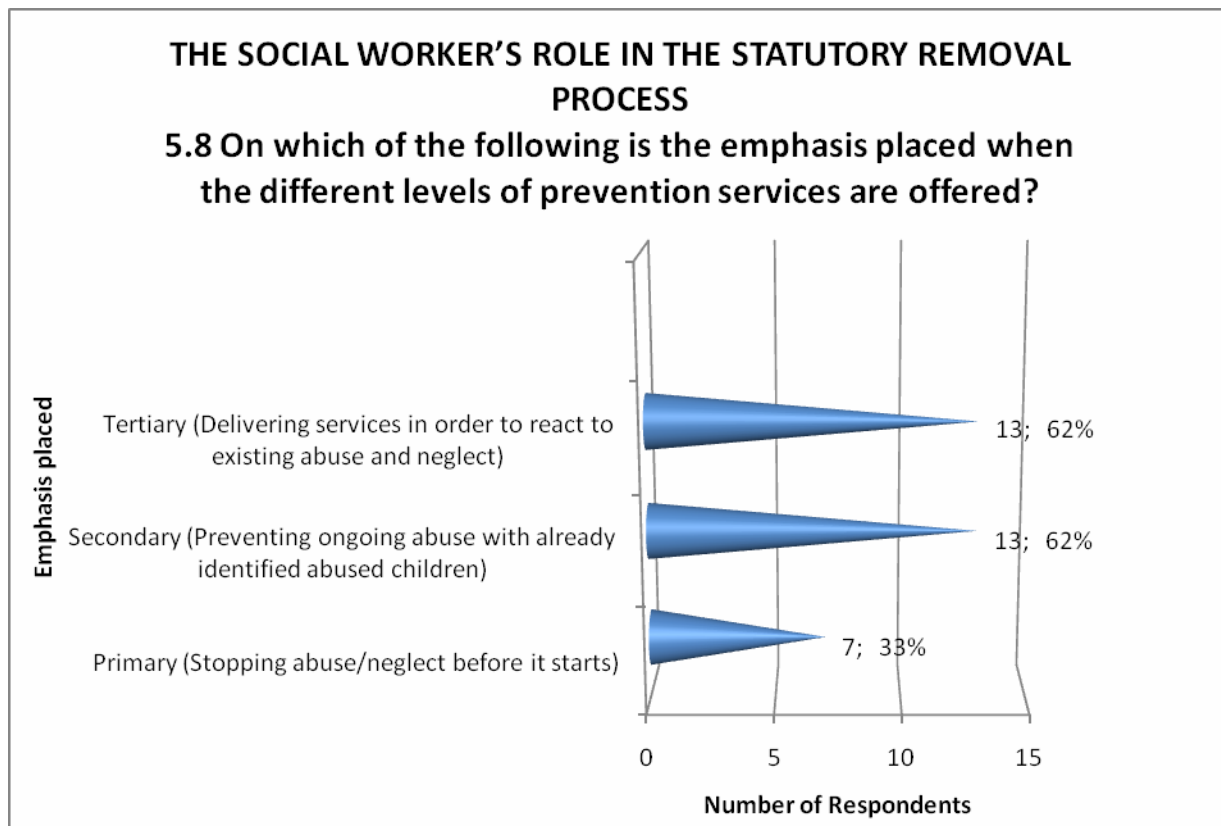
The results of the study show that reconstruction services are fragmented and ineffective because of insufficient time, heavy caseloads, lack of resources and parents lacking enough life skills to take responsibility for caring for their children. This seems to contradict the Financing Policy (1999) and White Paper for Social Welfare (1996:2-26) which identify the lack in shared responsibility, coordination and cooperation between different welfare organizations delivering reconstruction services in foster care, as the primary reason for fragmented and ineffective reconstruction service delivery.

#### **5.6.4 The social workers role in the statutory removal process**

According to the Children's Bill, 2002 (clause 158 (1) (b)) early intervention services are defined as "social work services provided to families where children are identified as being at risk of harm or removal into alternative care". Intervention services are thus delivered in order to avoid such interference.

##### ***5.6.4.1 The different levels of prevention services***

Another aspect that was investigated was whether social workers deliver prevention services in the foster care process, seeing that prevention services are important to prevent statutory intervention. Social workers were asked the question whether they delivered primary, secondary or tertiary intervention services to establish on which level of intervention they focus. The findings are described in figure 5.8.



**Figure 5.8: Emphasis placed on the different levels of prevention services**

Figure 5.8 indicates that seven (33%) of the respondents deliver primary prevention services. Table 5.8 shows an equal distribution between the categories of secondary and tertiary prevention, with 13 (62%) of the respondents delivering secondary and tertiary prevention services in each of the two categories.

This finding seems to reflect a lack of prevention services delivered by the social worker. This is in conflict with the Children's Bill (2002) (clause 158 (2) (b)) which emphasizes the importance of delivering primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services to families with children in order to strengthen and build their capacity and self-reliance, to address problems that may or are bound to occur in the family environment. Such problems if unresolved before they are too complex, may lead to statutory removal of the children.

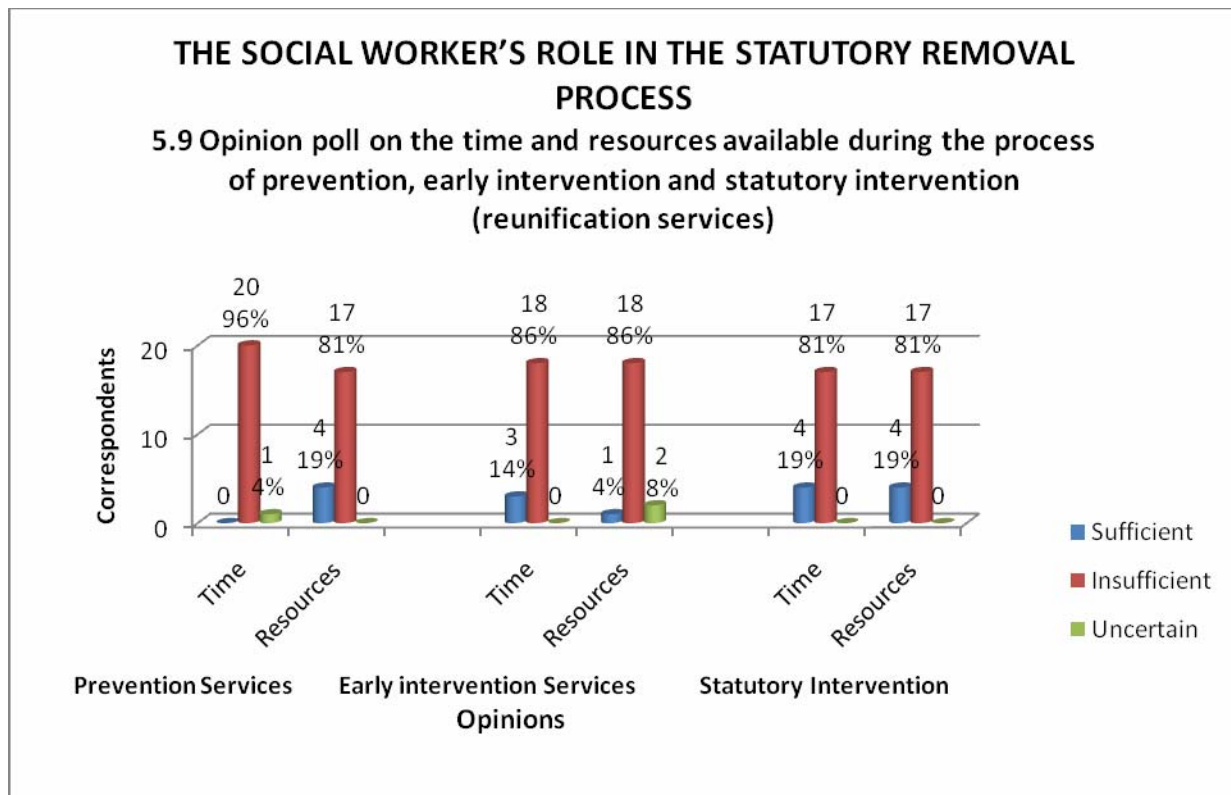


From the above finding it would appear that the majority of the social workers do not deliver prevention services, even though they are imperative in preventing children being removed from their biological parents.

***5.6.4.2 Time and resources available during the process of prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention (reunification services)***

Respondents were asked about the availability of time and resources to deliver prevention services in order to avoid the removal of children from their biological parents. The Child Care Act 73 of 1983 states that children are best cared for by their parents and should remain with their families, unless evidence contradicts this.(South Africa Law Community Review of Child Care Act Republic, 2002).

The Child Care Act 73 of 1983 thus emphasizes the importance of children to remain with their biological parents and it is therefore necessary to determine whether social workers have the time and resources to deliver prevention services, avoiding the statutory removal of children from their parents. The time and resources available to social workers in delivering prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention services are presented in figure 5.9.



**Figure 5.9 Time and resources available during the process of prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention (reunification services)**

As shown in figure 5.9, 20 (96%) of the respondents said that they did not have enough time to deliver prevention services and 17 (81%) said they did not have enough resources to deliver prevention services. Eighteen (86%) of the respondents said that they did not have enough time and resources to deliver early intervention services. Seventeen (81%) of the respondents agreed that they did not have enough time and resources to deliver statutory intervention (reunification) services.

This finding corresponds with Kleijn (2004:46) who found that many families do not receive prevention services due to social workers not having enough time. Heavy caseloads often leave social workers only enough time to deal with crisis situations, leaving no time for prevention services.

Kleijn (2004:93) adds that the heavy caseloads prevent social workers from delivering early intervention services, also insufficient time and resources, including insufficient

numbers of social workers to assess client's needs, provide support and empower clients. According to Kleijn (2004:93) governments should provide more resources and financial support to improve early intervention services, which prevent removal rather than maintain alternative placements such as foster care. Social workers also do not have the time or resources to deliver statutory intervention (reunification services) because of the amount of time spent in court appearances, preventing social workers from adhering to the time frames in the documented plan of reunification services.

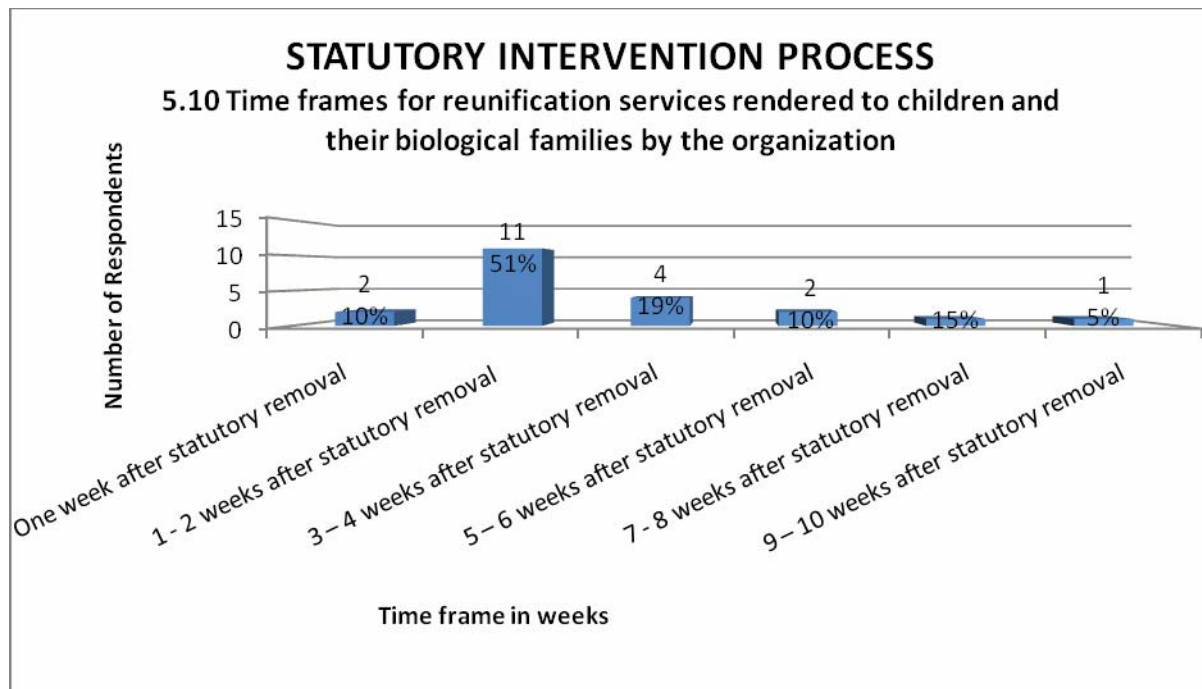
In conclusion it can be stated that this study shows that social workers do not have enough time and resources to deliver prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention services (reunification services).

### **5.6.5 Statutory intervention process**

Statutory services are rendered as stipulated in the Government Gazette (2006:106) by social workers in the process of reunifying children with their biological parents.

#### ***5.6.5.1 The different time frames of reunification services are rendered to children and their biological families***

Another aspect that was investigated was according to which time frames reunification services were rendered to children and their biological parents. This question is central to the title of this thesis: "The role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents" and was thus asked to gain an understanding of the different time frames within which social workers deliver reunification services. The results are presented in figure 5.10.



**Figure 5.10: The different time frames within which reunification services are rendered to children and their biological families**

As shown in figure 5.10 the majority, 11 (51%) of the respondents deliver reunification services between 1 to 2 weeks after statutory removal, four (19%) of the respondents deliver reconstruction services between 3 to 4 weeks after statutory removal. Figure 5.10 further shows that there is an equal distribution between the time frame categories of one week after statutory removal and 5 to 6 weeks after statutory removal, with two (10%) respondents in each category. The remaining respondents delivered reunification services between 7 to 8 and 9 to 10 weeks, with one (5%) respondent in each category. These findings seem to be in conflict with Kleijn (2004:24-25) statement that children and families should receive reunification services immediately after their placement in alternative care, where the focus is to be on helping children and their families adjust separately and to arrange continuous contact between children and their parents. According to Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 157) children and families should receive reunification services before and after reunification.

From the above findings, it would appear that social workers do not deliver reunification services as soon as children are removed from their biological parents in an attempt to ensure the prompt return of children to their families.

## **5.7 SUMMARY**

The research findings contained in this chapter reflect a wide scope of the reconstruction and supervision services social workers deliver in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. Most of the findings correlated with the findings of studies conducted by other authors who were referred to in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 of the research, although differences were acknowledged.

Aspects hampering the delivery of reconstruction services to foster children, biological parents and foster families were identified, and the findings clarified the role of the social worker in the statutory removal, statutory intervention and reconstruction services delivered in foster care.

The findings of the study should give social workers and other professional greater insight into delivering effective reconstruction and supervision services with foster children, biological parents and foster families. The findings can provide social workers and welfare agencies currently working in foster care with some guidelines on how to improve reconstruction services in an attempt to reunite foster children with their biological parents as soon as possible.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE NATURE OF RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES RENDERED BY SOCIAL WORKERS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Service Delivery Model (2004) emphasize the necessity of implementing social development and strengths perspectives in reconstruction services to foster children and biological families. It is however not clear how social workers apply services in practice.

The objectives of the study were to explore the process and procedures of social workers' delivery of welfare services to foster children within the South African context in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983; to describe the role of social workers in foster care and reconstruction service delivery and to explain how the various tasks in the social work process should be rendered according to the social development and strengths perspectives. This chapter will also discuss the different services social workers deliver to foster families, biological parents and foster children during reconstruction and supervision, the nature of reconstruction services as well as the role of the social worker in poverty alleviation, delivering services regarding the life cycle approach, and the service delivery model (2007) as well as how to improve the delivery of reconstruction services to foster children, biological parents and foster families.

These objectives were formulated to gain a better understanding of how social workers render various welfare services during the social work process regarding the assessment and contracting, action, reunification and evaluation phases in the effort to contribute to the reunification of foster children with their biological parents, in terms of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

## 6.2 THE SOCIAL WORK PROCESS IN RECONSTRUCTION SERVICE DELIVERY

According to Eloff (2002:1) reconstruction services forms a very important part of services in child welfare in South Africa, where social workers act as the catalyst to render the reconstruction services to both foster children and their parents. Reconstruction service delivery involves various tasks to be performed by social workers. Social workers' ability to perform these tasks in the social work process during the assessment, contracting, action, reunification, evaluation and termination phases will now be discussed.

### 6.2.1 Tasks performed during the various phases of the social work process

The tasks performed by social workers during the phases of the social work process, were investigated. The results are presented in figure 6.1.

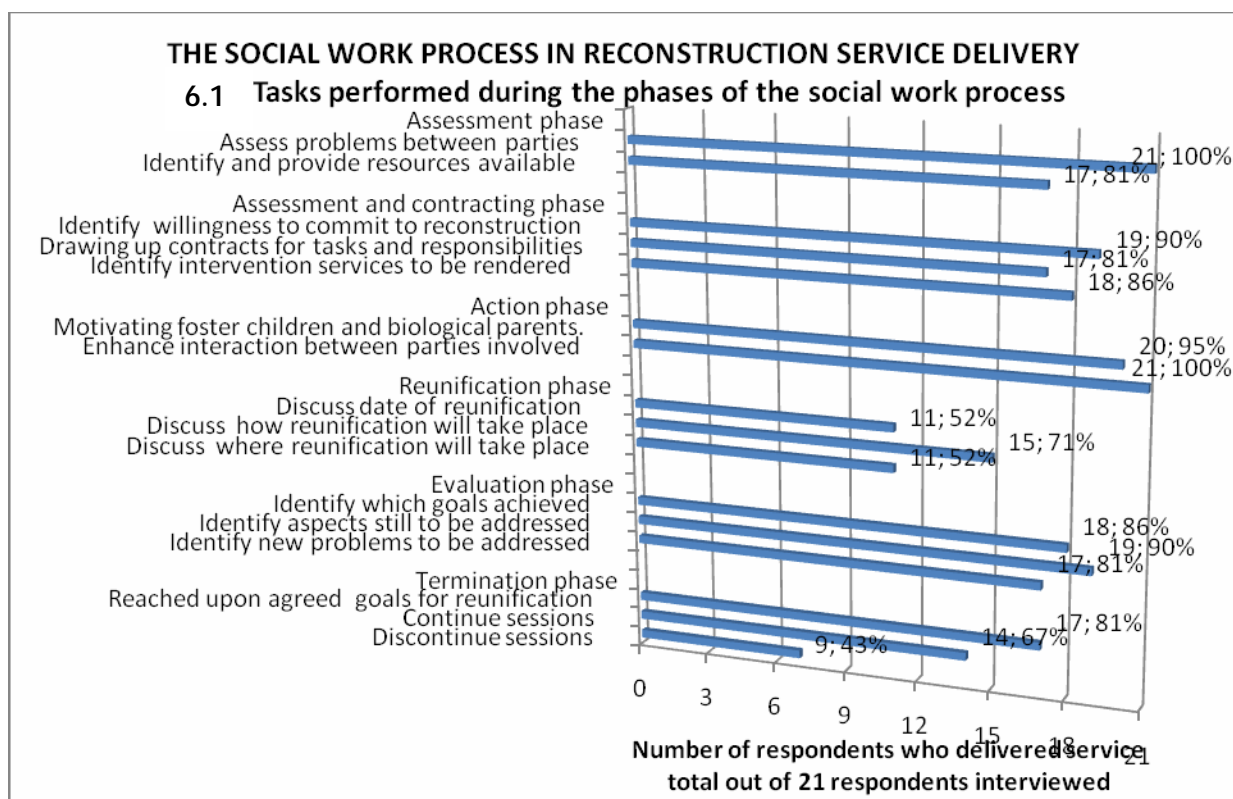


Figure 6.1: Tasks performed during the various phases of the social work process

- **Assessment of problems**

Twenty-one (100%) of the respondents performed tasks which included assessing foster children and biological parents' problems and seventeen (81%) of the respondents stated that they identified and provided the necessary resources available to foster children and biological parents during the assessment phase. This finding corresponds with that of Roberts (2005:431) who explains that assessment is a task social workers must utilize to understand problems in families. According to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 social workers during the assessment phase also have the responsibility to provide resources for the family such as financial support as well as provide the family with the necessary knowledge, enabling them to make informed decisions.

From the above findings it can thus be concluded that the majority of the social workers render services to both foster children and biological parents including assessment and providing resources for the family.

- **Willingness of parents to commit to reconstruction services**

Nineteen (90%) of the respondents in the sample found it necessary to probe the willingness of the family to commit to reconstruction services. The review of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 states that social workers should before the start of intervention services identify the willingness of families to commit to reconstruction services, thereby establishing their commitment to the process of reunification with their children.

The findings indicate that the majority of social workers identify the willingness of families to commit to reconstruction services in the foster care process, thereby determining exactly which steps to be taken to promote reunification.

- **Use of contracts**

The rest of the findings were dispersed, with seventeen (81%) of the respondents agreeing that at the end of the assessment phase they draw up contracts, clarifying both foster children's, biological parents' and social workers' tasks and responsibilities



during reconstruction, and eighteen (86%) respondents stating that they identify which intervention services would be rendered during reconstruction delivery.

This finding corresponds with that of Eloff (1987:40), who stresses the importance of social workers' formulation of contracts, which are a constant reminder of the different roles, tasks and time frames clarifying the responsibility of both social workers, children and their biological families and at the same time provide opportunities to inform biological parents and children which services will be rendered as well as under which conditions.

- **Tasks during the action phase**

Another aspect which was investigated was whether social workers deliver the following tasks during the action phase of the social work process: motivating foster children and biological parents as well as enhancing the interaction between the parties involved. The information reflected in figure 6.1 shows the distribution of twenty (95%) of the respondents motivating both foster children and biological parents to communicate and interact during reconstruction delivery and twenty-one (100%) of the respondents stating that they promote the interaction between foster children and biological parents to improve their communication abilities and relationships.

This corresponds with findings by Lerwick (2002:43) that the social worker as facilitator in the action phase motivates parents to communicate and interact with their children during reconstruction delivery and enhance their interaction. The interaction is observed by the social worker in order to determine the progress of the parents' ability to communicate with their children.

From the above findings it would appear that the majority of social workers motivate, promote and observe interaction between biological parents and their children to establish the progress in their communication abilities and relationship. The results are presented in figure 6.1 presented above.

Lerwick (2002:43) states that the reunification phase is a crucial phase in the reconstruction process where the concrete steps to be taken in reunification are identified.

Social workers, together with children and parents should decide on how, when and where reunification will take place, and social workers should assess the family in making decisions regarding the reunification process. As shown in figure 6.1 just more than half (11 or 52%) of the respondents discussed the exact date and place for reunification to take place.

- **Discussion of reunification**

Fifteen (71%) of the respondents stated that they discussed exactly how reunification will take place. These findings correspond to a lesser extent with the literature where Lerwick (2002:43) emphasizes the importance of social workers establishing the date of, how and where reunification will take place during the reunification phase. It can be concluded that some of the social workers do not discuss these details, relating to the reunification will take place in the reunification phase.

- **Evaluation of goal achievement**

Another aspect that was investigated was whether social workers in the evaluation phase identify which goals have been achieved, identify which aspects still need to be addressed and identify new problems that need to be addressed. Figure 6.1 shows a close distribution between the numbers of social workers (17,18,19) rendering services during the evaluation phase.

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents identified the goals that needed to be achieved, nineteen (90%) identified which aspects still needed to be addressed and seventeen (81%) of the respondents identified new problems that needed to be addressed. These findings relating to the social workers understanding the importance of the evaluation phase, thus correspond with those of Lerwick (2002:45), who states that evaluation further enables social workers to establish which tasks or problems still need to be addressed before the reunification of foster children and biological parents. Lerwick

(2002:45) also emphasizes that continuous evaluation throughout the foster care process is a necessity enabling the social worker to identify new problems that need to be addressed.

The majority of the social workers understand the importance of rendering services in the evaluation phase and render services where they identify which goals have been achieved, identify aspects that still need to be addressed and identify new problems to be addressed which can prevent foster children and biological parents from reuniting.

- **Termination**

The last phase in the social work process to be investigated was whether social workers during the termination phase have the ability to reach agreed-upon goals for reunification, whether social workers continue with sessions after termination or whether they discontinue services after the termination phase. The results are presented in figure 6.1.

Seventeen (81%) of the respondents in the sample did reach the agreed upon goals for reunification during the termination phase in the social work process. This finding corresponds with Lerwick's (2002:45) emphasis on the importance of social workers reaching set goals such as helping both foster children and their biological parents to change their behaviour and address their problems in order to reach agreed goals and facilitate reunification with children, whilst giving continuous supervision and motivation. Social workers thus understand that reaching the agreed upon goals is essential towards improving parents' functioning, which in turn leads to the possible reunification of foster parents and their children.

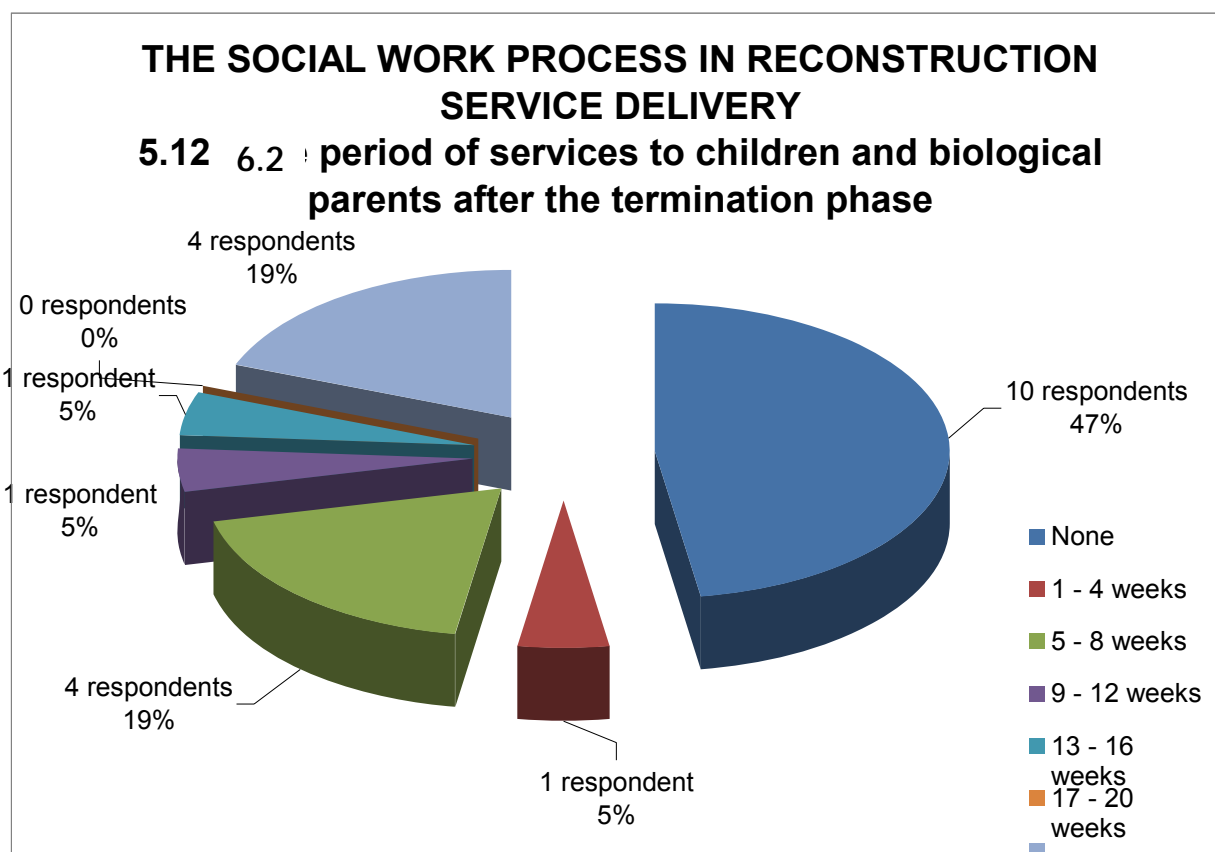
Fourteen (67%) respondents stated that they continue delivering services in the termination phase, and nine (43%) of the respondents reported that they discontinued these sessions. Lerwick (2002:46) emphasizes the importance of rendering services in the termination phase, where the social worker needs to deliver services for at least six months after reunification, taking opportunities for continuous monitoring and support of families when integration problems might occur. Only seven (33%) of the respondents concluded that they do not continue with sessions. The majority of social workers thus

understand the need for the continuation of services, although about a third (33%) do not continue rendering services.

### 6.2.2 The continuation of services to children and biological parents after the termination phase

Another aspect that was investigated was for which period of time social workers render services to children and biological parents after termination as stipulated in the documented plan in the contract.

This question examines the prevalence of social workers delivering services after termination, establishing whether social workers have the time to deliver continuous services to children and their biological parents after termination. The results are presented in figure 6.2.



**Figure 6.2: The continuation of services to children and biological parents after the termination phase**

Ten (47%) of the respondents do not deliver any services for any period of time after the termination phase. Four (19%) of the respondents deliver services for 5-8 weeks and four (19%) deliver services between 21-24 weeks after termination. Figure 6.2 further shows that there is an equal distribution between the time frames of 1-4 weeks; 9-12 and 13-16 weeks, with one (5%) of the respondents in each category.

This finding is thus in conflict with the recommendation by Lerwick (2002:46) that social workers need to deliver services for at least six months after termination, when children are reunited with their parents, providing the social worker with opportunities to continuously monitor and support the family.

The delivery of services after termination allows social workers to address issues that might appear and enables them to attend to integration problems before they become obstacles preventing the family to adjust to the reunification with their children.

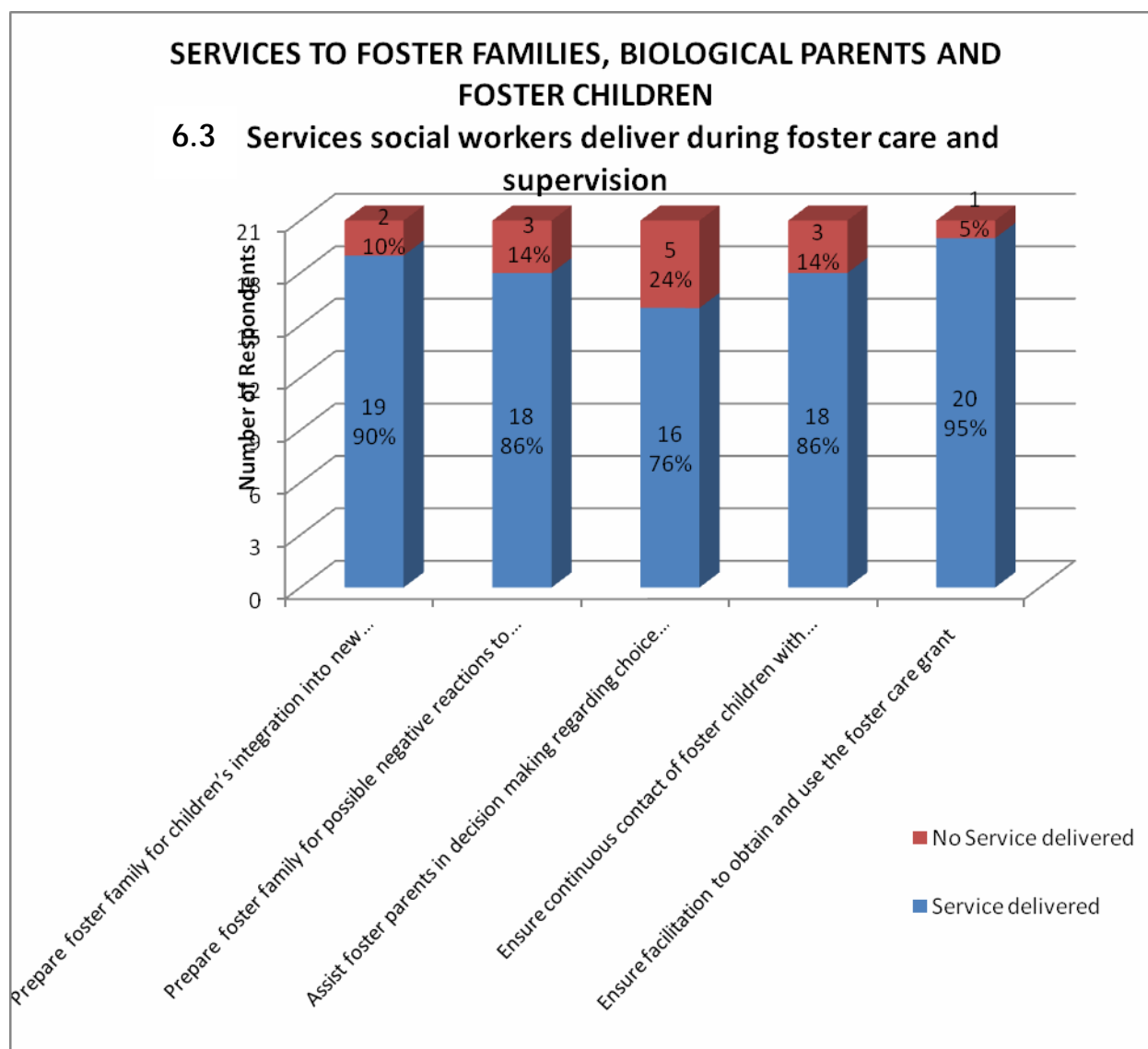
In conclusion, it can be stated that the majority of social workers clearly do not deliver any services to children and their parents after the termination of their sessions.

### **6.3 SERVICES TO FOSTER FAMILIES, BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND FOSTER CHILDREN**

According to Eloff (1987:1), social workers have an important task to fulfil in the delivery of services to both children and their families in foster care. The Child Care Act 73 of 1983 states that foster care provides children with a place of safety where both children and their families can benefit from reunification and supervision services.

#### **6.3.1 Nature of services social workers deliver during foster care and supervision**

Social workers deliver services during foster care and supervision to both children and their parents. The social workers were asked to identify which services they deliver. The results are presented in figure 6.3.



**Figure 6.3: Nature of services social workers deliver during foster care and supervision**

- **Preparation of foster family for foster children's integration**

Nineteen (90%) of the respondents said they prepare the foster family for the foster children's integration into the new family. This finding corresponds with the requirements of the Children's Act 2005 No. 38 of 2005 (section 156) that the delivery of services to children is necessary to assist the children in their integration into the new family, helping them with the initial adjustment into their new family.

- **Preparation for possible negative reactions to foster placements**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents stated that they deliver services to the foster family to prepare them for children's possible negative reactions to the foster care placement. This finding corresponds with section 15(1)(b) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (Diedericks, 2000:5) where the social worker needs to prepare foster parents for children's possibly negative reactions to their placement, equipping foster parents to be aware of the reasons for foster children's specific behaviour and helping find ways to accommodate and understand foster children's possibly negative reactions. Sixteen (76%) of the respondents stated that they assist foster parents in decision making regarding foster children's choice of school. The literature referred to in Van Rensburg (2006:37), confirms the importance of social workers assisting foster parents in making decisions regarding foster children's choice of school.

- **Ensuring continuous contact**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents said they take steps to ensure continuous contact of foster children with their biological parents. This finding correlates with the Child Care Act (section 156) where the court order stipulates that services be rendered to facilitate continuous contact between biological parents and their children to provide a connection between their present and past. According to Smith (1984:22) social workers should ensure that continuous contact is made between foster children and biological parents for the development of healthy relationship between children and their families. Biehal and Wade (2004:434) state that social workers play a mediating role in helping children repair the links with their parents through continuous contact in an attempt to reunify the children with their families.

- **Enabling foster families to obtain and use the foster care grant**

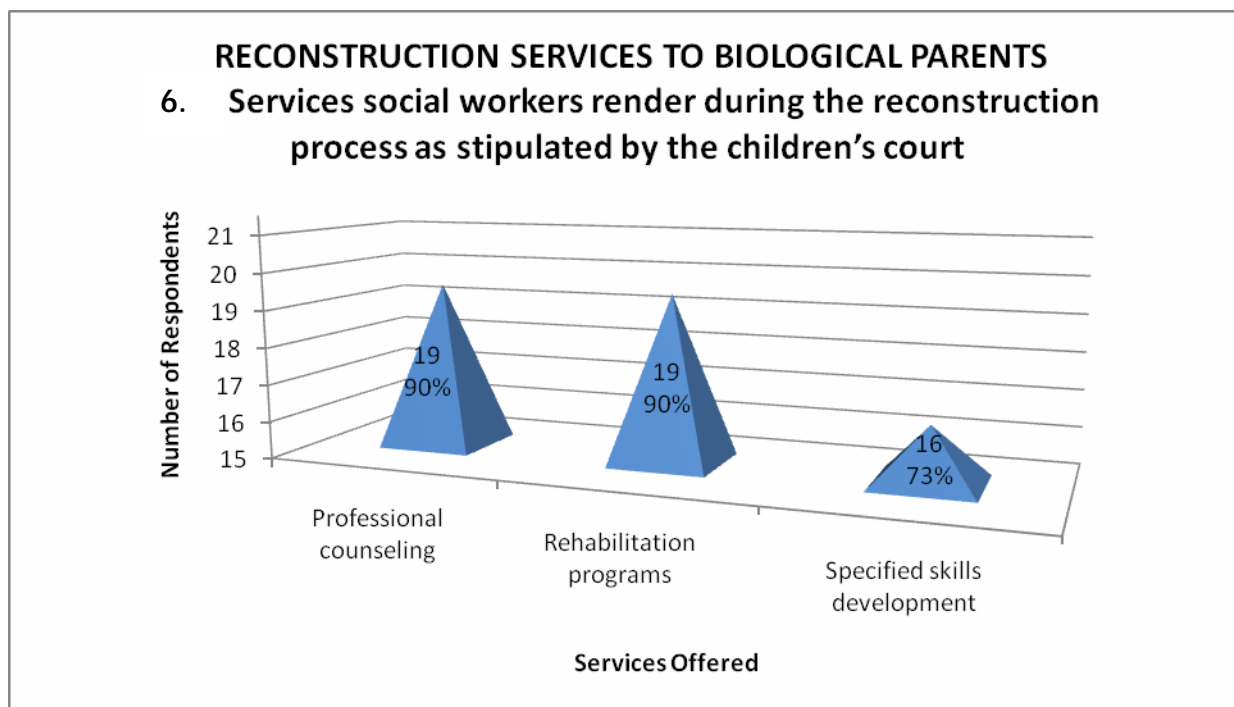
Twenty (95%) of the respondents said they ensure facilitation of the foster care grant, enabling foster families to obtain and use the grant. As was found by Van Rensburg (2006:28), financial support through the foster care grant is an indispensable form of assistance to foster families, helping them provide for children's clothing, food and general maintenance.

From the above findings it can thus be concluded that the majority of social workers deliver services during foster care and supervision. These services aim to prepare children's integration into the new family, prepare the family for the foster care placement and the possibly negative reactions of foster children to their placement, assist foster parents in decision making, ensure continuous contact of foster children with biological parents and ensure facilitation to enable the foster parents to obtain and use the foster care grant.

In conclusion it can be stated that the majority of the social workers clearly understand the importance of service delivery during foster care and supervision.

#### 6.4 RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES TO BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

Services delivered by social workers during the reconstruction process, including professional counselling, rehabilitation programmes and specific skills development were investigated. The findings are presented in figure 6.4.



**Figure 6.4: Services social workers render during the reconstruction process as stipulated by the children's court**



#### **6.4.1 Services rendered by social workers during the reconstruction process as stipulated by the children's court**

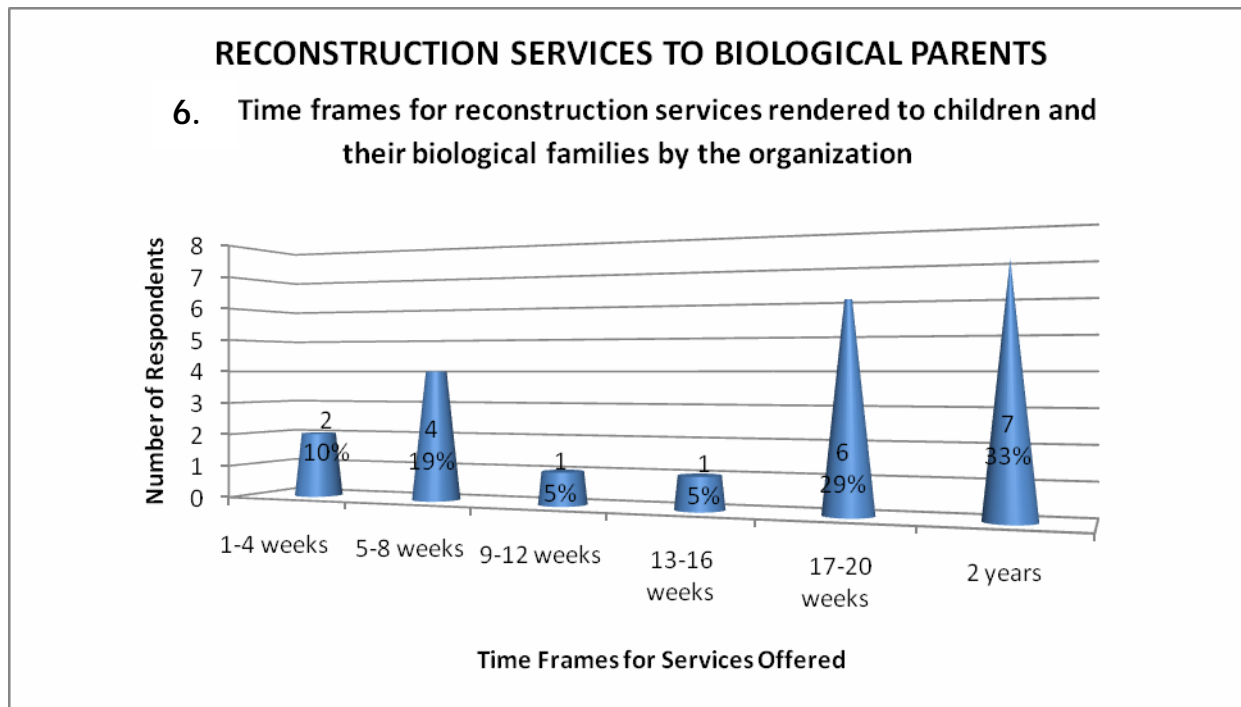
Figure 6.4 shows a close distribution of the number of social workers rendering services during the reconstruction process as stipulated by (order of) the children's court. As shown in figure 6.4 most of the respondents, nineteen (90%), delivered both professional counselling and rehabilitation action programmes. Sixteen (73%) stated that they delivered specified skills development.

This finding corresponds with findings in literature where the importance of delivering the abovementioned services is emphasized. According to the Government Gazette (2006:58) vulnerable parents and children by order of the children's court should receive intervention services from social workers in the form of professional counselling, rehabilitation programmes and specified skills development in the process of reconstruction during foster care, enabling parents to have their children returned to their care as soon as they have overcome their problems.

The findings thus indicate that the majority of social workers deliver professional counselling, rehabilitation programmes and specified skills development during the reconstruction process as stipulated by the children's court.

#### **6.4.2 Different time frames of reconstruction services rendered to children and biological families by the organization**

According to Eloff (1987:45) the best time to deliver reconstruction services to the parents is immediately after the placement of foster children in their new foster families. Respondents were thus asked according to which time frames they deliver reconstruction services. The results/findings are presented in figure 6.5.



**Figure 6:5: Different time frames during which reconstruction services are rendered to children and biological families by the organization**

Figure 6.5 shows that the majority of social workers did not immediately start with reconstruction services after children were removed. Two (10%) of the respondents delivered reconstruction services between 1-4 weeks after children were removed. Four (19%) of the respondents delivered reconstruction services between 5-8 weeks after children were removed.

Figure 6.5 shows that there is an equal distribution between the time frames of 9-12 weeks and 13-16 weeks, with one (5%) of the respondents in each category delivering reconstruction services. The rest of the respondents delivering reconstruction services were distributed as follows: six (29%) delivered services between 17-20 weeks and seven (33%) of the respondents delivered services only after two years. This finding is in conflict with Eloff (1987:40) who states that the best time to deliver reconstruction services to the parents is immediately after the placement because parents are motivated and optimistic to change their behaviour. Social workers should thus take a directive role in improving the area of dysfunction responsible for the initial placement of children in foster care.

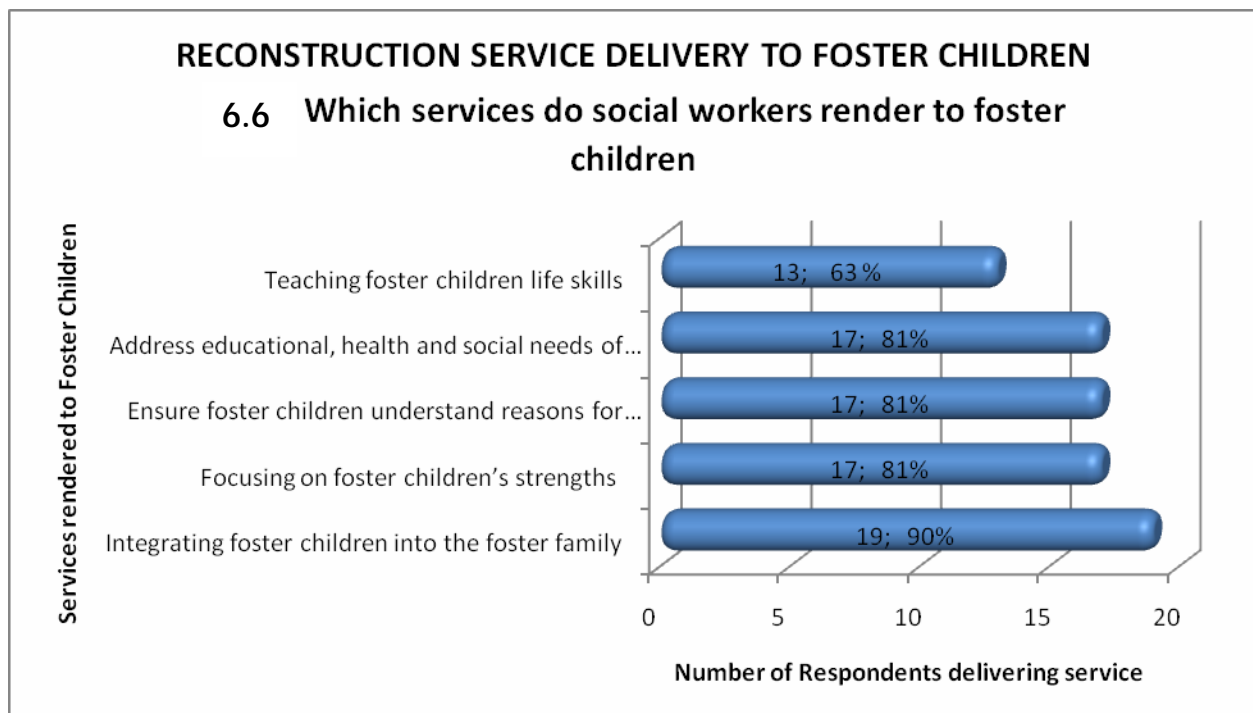
From the above findings it can be concluded however that social workers, do not deliver reconstruction services to children and biological parents immediately after the placement of the foster children in their new foster families.

## 6.5 RECONSTRUCTION SERVICE DELIVERY TO FOSTER CHILDREN

According to Puleng (2004:28) social workers not only play an important role in helping foster children adjust to their new families, but also have the important task to meet children's basic and extra needs throughout reconstruction service delivery in an attempt to return children to their families as soon as possible.

### 6.5.1 Services social workers are rendering to foster children

Services delivered to foster children were a factor considered while determining the specific services social workers render to foster children. The results of the findings are presented in figure 6.6.



**Figure 6.6: Services social workers are rendering to foster children**

- **Foster children's integration into their new family**

As shown in figure 6.6, nineteen (90%) of the respondents delivered services to assist foster children's integration process into their new family. This finding corresponds with Diedericks (2000:5) who explains that according to section 15 (1) (b) of Child Care Act 74 of 1983 the primary objective of service delivery to foster children during foster care entails the preparation for children's integration into the new family.

- **Focusing on foster children's strengths**

Seventeen (81%) of the respondents' focus was on foster children's strengths. This finding corresponds with Cuddeback's (2002:882) view that social workers have to assist children to build on their strengths, empowering them to focus on their positive attributes.

Social workers using a strengths perspective in facilitating the assessment process, discover, explore and use client's strengths while helping them achieve their goals and realize their dreams. The formula is simple: mobilize client's strengths in order to assist them in the process of achieving their goals and vision and the clients will have a better quality of life, and live on their own terms.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) also emphasizes the importance of empowering families and focusing on their strengths instead of their problems during reconstruction services in the foster care process.

- **Ensuring foster children understand the original reasons for leaving their families**

Of the twenty-one respondents, seventeen (81%) stated that they deliver services to ensure foster children understand the original reasons for leaving their family. This finding corresponds with Steyn (2005:39) who emphasizes the importance of social workers trying to help children understand their past, by explaining in a logical and socially acceptable way the reason for their placement. Social workers are the facilitators enabling children to recognize the reasons for their parents' behaviour and

assist them to develop an understanding for the situation they are in, as well as the reasons for their perceived rejection, helping them to have less anger towards parents, and rather use their time in foster care to heal and grow.

- **Addressing the education, health, and social needs of foster children**

Seventeen (81%) of the respondents stated that they addressed the education, health and social needs of foster children.

This finding where the majority of the social workers deliver services to address the abovementioned needs is in agreement with the literature, stressing that the educational needs of foster children need to be addressed, and social workers need to assist children in meeting their educational needs.

The social worker according to Cuddeback (2002:88) is responsible for improving the relationship between the educational personnel and the children. This means improving educational personnel's understanding of the children's situations, and motivating educational personnel to give extra support, motivation and understanding to meet foster children's educational needs. Social workers, in collaboration with the educational personnel, must address and teach children standards consistent with today's societal norms, such as proper hygiene and other age-appropriate skills.

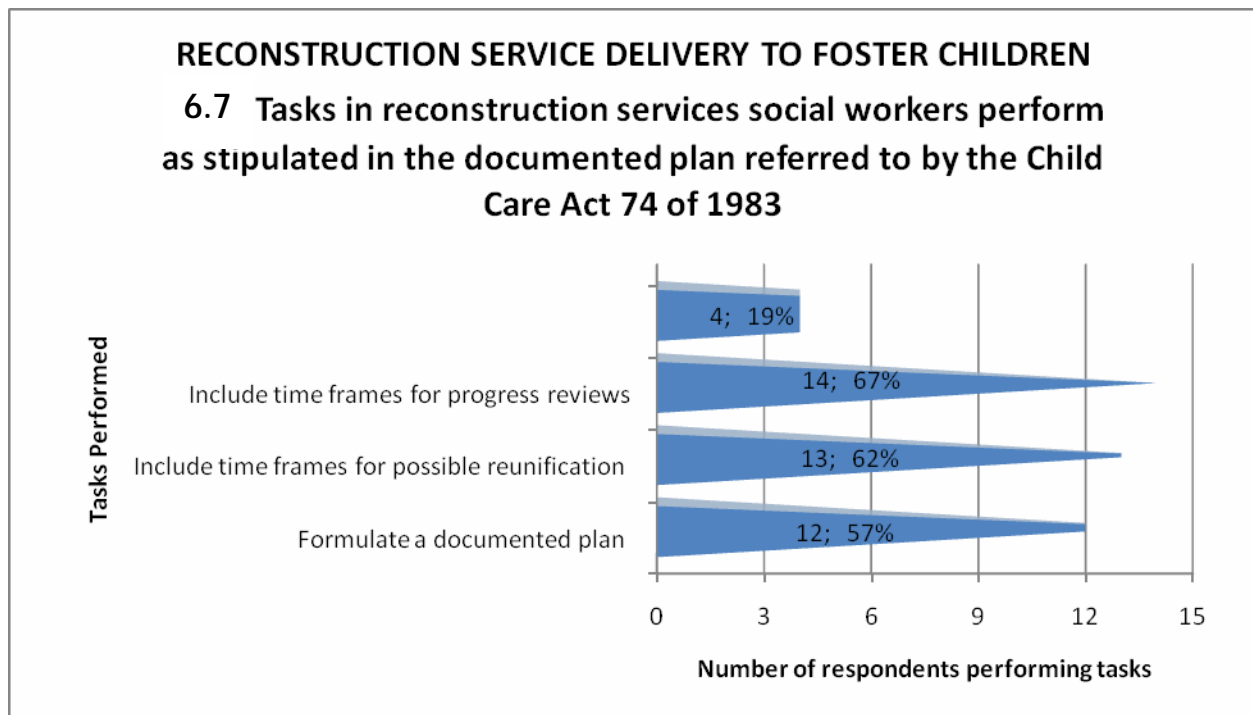
- **Teaching life skills programmes to children**

The remainder of the thirteen (63%) respondents stated that they taught foster children the necessary life skills. Although Steppingstones Foster Care (2007) emphasizes the importance of social workers in teaching life skills to children, and the lack of life skills in many children due to improper parenting and unstable living circumstances, eight (38%) of the respondents did not deliver any life skills programmes to children.

From the above findings it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents delivered reconstruction services, although an insufficient number of social workers delivered life skills to foster children in the foster care process.

### 6.5.2 Tasks in reconstruction services social workers perform as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983

The study determined which tasks social workers deliver during reconstruction services as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. The findings are presented in figure 6.7.



**Figure 6.7: Tasks in reconstruction services social workers perform as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983**

- **Formulating a documented plan**

As shown in figure 6.7, fourteen (67%) is the highest number of social workers performing tasks in reconstruction services as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983. Twelve (57%) of the respondents formulated a documented plan in reconstruction services. Nine (43%) respondents thus did not formulate any documented plans although it is stated in the Review of Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (2002) that in every case plan where children are placed in foster

care, the court will be supplied with a documented plan aimed at achieving stability for the children, with priority given to family reunification.

- **Time frames for possible reunification**

Thirteen (62%) of the respondents delivered reconstruction services which included time frames for possible reunification in the foster care process.

The Review of the Child Care Act 73 of 1983 (2002) identifies time frames in the reunification process as an important part of services in reconstruction service delivery to foster children where social workers are responsible for formulating specific time frames.

- **Progress of foster children in foster care**

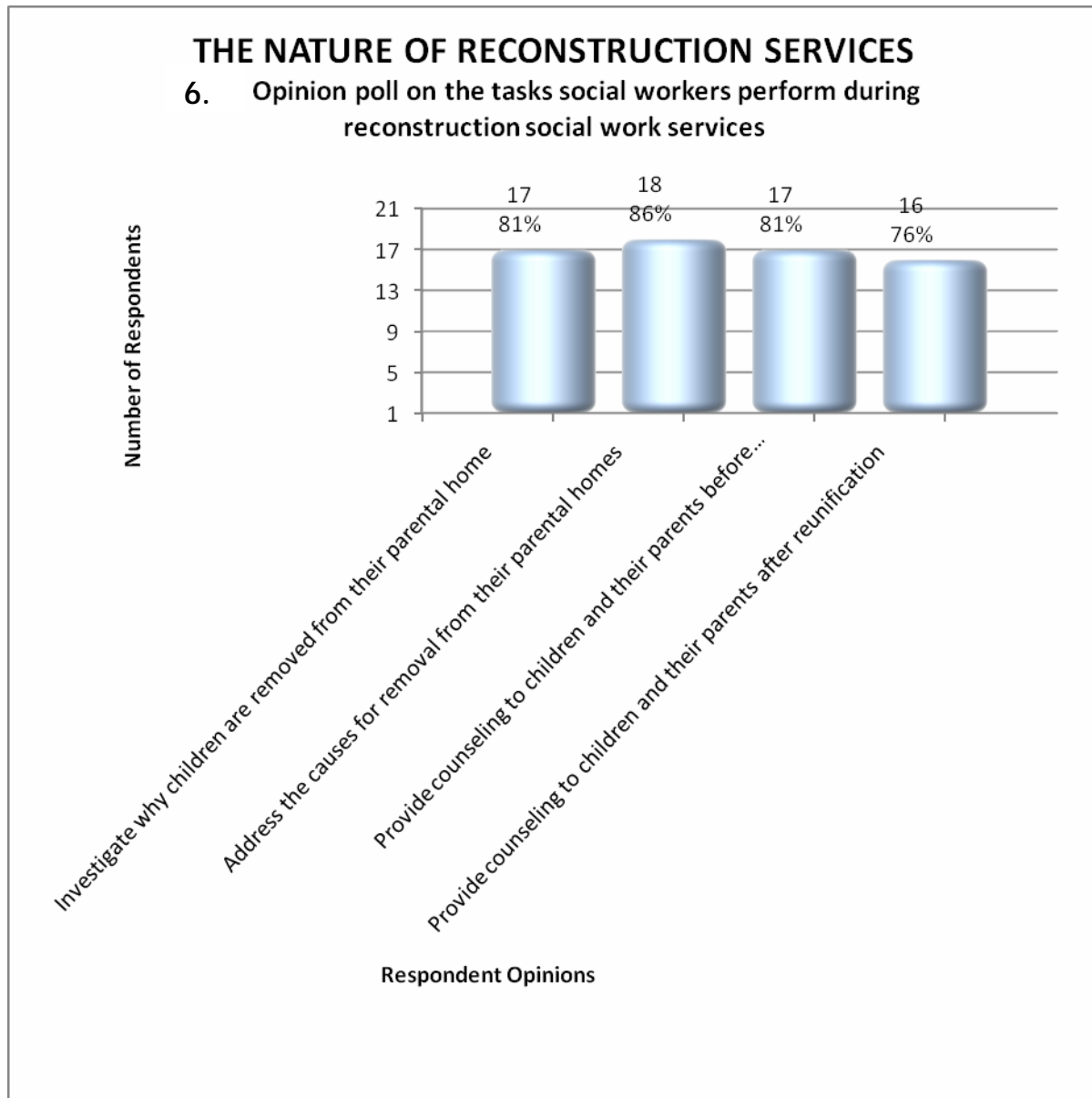
Fourteen (67%) of the respondents reported that they include time frames for review regarding the progress of foster children in foster care. According to Eloff (1987:50) the initial review should take place within the first three months and a successive review on a monthly basis. These reviews enable social workers to be aware of the progress or lack thereof of foster children, whether children need change or supplementary services rendered or whether services need to be altered to address additional needs. Seven (33%) of the respondents thus did not include time frames for reviews regarding foster children's progress.

Although the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (2002) stipulates that programmes be drawn up by social workers to deliver to foster children in foster care, and that the children be monitored as to how they have accomplished tasks and milestones as identified in the documented plan, the findings of the study indicate that only four (19%) of the respondents deliver programmes during reconstruction. The findings indicate that the majority of the social workers thus do not deliver the programmes during reconstruction.

From the above findings it can be concluded that social workers do not deliver tasks in the reconstruction process as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

## 6.6 THE NATURE OF RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES

According to the Government Gazette (2005) these tasks relating to reconstruction services include both the investigation into, and addressing, of the reasons why children left their parental home as well as providing counselling to children before and after reunification. Another aspect investigated was whether social workers deliver certain tasks in reconstruction service delivery. The results are presented in table 6.8.



**Figure 6.8: Tasks social workers perform during reconstruction social work services**



### **6.6.1 Tasks social workers perform during reconstruction social work services**

Figure 6.8 shows that most (17 or 81%) of the respondents agreed that tasks such as investigating the reasons why children are removed from their parental home is important.

- **Investigating the causes of children leaving their family homes**

This finding corresponds with the Government Gazette, (2005) which emphasizes the need for social workers to investigate the reason why children left their family home initially. The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 (section 157) provides for official investigations by social workers into the causes of alleged abuse and neglect leading to children's removal and placement in alternative care. Swann (2006:2) stated in the Adoption and Assistance and Child Welfare Act (1980) that social workers are instructed in the reconstruction process to examine the existing situation in the family home instantaneously after the statutory removal of children. According to Delfabbro and Cooper (2003:20-32) reconstruction service delivery's primary objective is to examine the causes of family disintegration, preventing recurrence.

- **Addressing the causes of children removed from their parental homes**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents stated that they address the reasons why children are removed from their parental home. The Government Gazette (2005) stresses that social workers have a responsibility to address the causes of children leaving their parental home, and to take precautionary action to prevent a recurrence of abuse and/or neglect. According to the Child Protection Services (2002) social workers have the rights and responsibility to undertake routine investigations in response to accusations of abuse and neglect. In accordance with section 12 in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 the social worker must complete the prescribed form 4 where the children removed are indeed in need of care.

- **Providing counselling before and after reunification**

Seventeen (81%) respondents stated that they provide counselling before reunification and sixteen (76%) provide counselling to foster children and biological parents after

reunification. These findings are in line with the Government Gazette (2005) which emphasizes the role of social workers in providing counselling to both foster children and biological parents before and after reunification.

Lerwick (2002:20) also points to the importance of social workers delivering counselling to children before reunification when they need to help solve problems that led to the initial placement, and with the intent of returning foster children to the care of their parents.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) and the Inter-Ministerial Committee for vulnerable youth's legislation (1996) as well as the National Plan of Action (1995) identify the need for reconstruction service delivery, in an attempt to ensure that foster children are reunited with their biological parents. This finding echoes that of Reich (2007:16), that the focal point of reconstruction services is the social worker's responsibility to provide counselling to develop the parent's parenting proficiency and to implement coping mechanisms to avoid integration and adaptation problems with the return of the children.

These findings indicate that the majority of social workers perform tasks in the reconstruction process that investigate and address the reasons why children are removed from their parent's home, and provide counselling to children before and after reunification.

## **6.7 FOSTER CARE AND RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES RENDERED ACCORDING TO THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE**

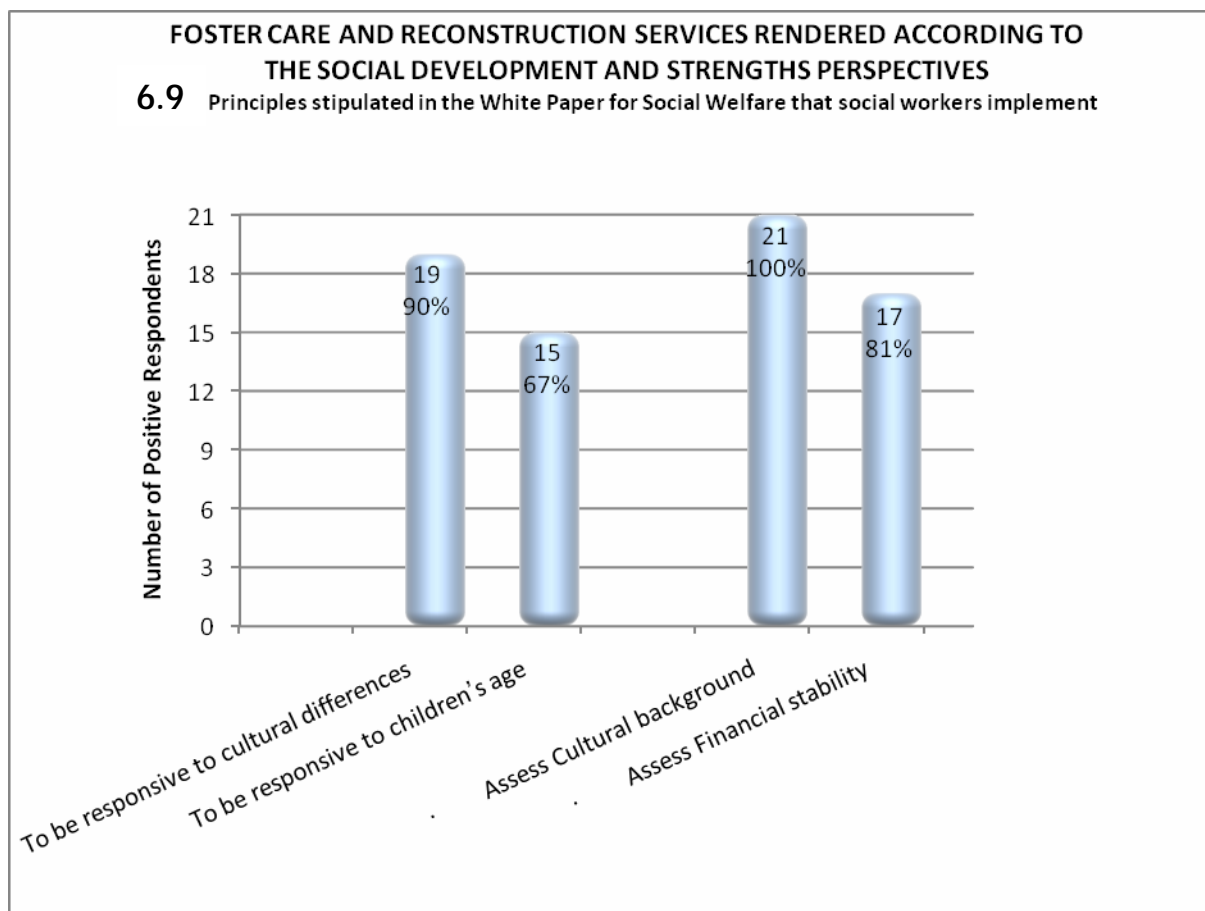
According to Whittaker (2002:11-12) social workers have an important responsibility when choosing foster care placements because children's culture, age and religion are important considerations.

### **6.7.1 Principles social workers are implementing as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997)**

Social workers also adhere to the principles of appropriateness, non-discrimination and the human rights of children as set out in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry

for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). This means that children's rights to an environment where their chances of success are heightened by ensuring that their culture, age and religion are kept in mind in the choice of foster care placements.

The principles as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) are thus important for social workers to uphold. The results indicating whether social workers adhere to these principles will be presented in figure 6.9.



**Figure 6.9: The principles social workers are implementing as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997)**

- **Responsiveness to cultural differences**

Most (19 or 90%) of the respondents admitted to being responsive to cultural differences in choosing placements. This finding corresponds with Donkoh's (2005:5) view that social workers should respect the cultural background of foster children, and should at all times show respect, understanding and sensitivity to children's needs regarding their cultural context.

Social workers should adhere to the principles as directed in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) setting out the children's basic rights to communities resembling their own culture and similar standards; children should not suffer as a result of differences in cultural beliefs, values and traditions.

- **Considering the age of children when choosing foster care placements**

Although Crea (2007:142-156) emphasizes social workers' responsibility to ensure that foster care placements are appropriate to the children's age, six (29%) of the respondents do not adhere to this principles as stated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). When age differences are great between foster children and parents both sides will be challenged to reach a workable relationship, otherwise foster care placements will be daunting and not conducive to children's development (Fraser, 1996:356). Choosing a placement for children is a complex decision where the age of foster children is a very important factor that determines the positive progress of these children.

Responsiveness to age is thus important when choosing foster care placements for children. It can be concluded that the majority of social workers are responsive to children's age in choosing a placement in foster care.

- **Assessing prospective families level of fitness regarding cultural background**

All (21 or 100%) of the respondents stated that they assess the prospective foster family with regards to cultural background. This finding corresponds with the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) which requires social workers to ensure that children are placed in environments non-discriminatory to their cultural differences, and where their cultural diversity is respected.

When children and parents do not agree on aspects such as cultural beliefs, traditions and values it leads to placement breakdowns, delaying reunification for children and their biological parents.

- **Assessing prospecting foster families' level of fitness regarding religion and financial stability**

Sixteen (67%) of the respondents assessed prospective families' level of fitness regarding religion and seventeen (81%) of the respondents assessed families' financial stability. This finding corresponds with literature stating that social workers are important in assessing prospective families and they must confirm that foster families practice a similar religion as that of the foster children and that they are financially self-sufficient (Morrison, 2007:142-149).

From the above findings it can be concluded that the majority of social workers are responsive to foster children's culture and age when choosing placements for them and do assess prospective families regarding their culture, religion and age.

## **6.8 POVERTY ALLEVIATION AS STIPULATED IN THE WHITE PAPER FOR SOCIAL WELFARE (MINISTRY FOR WELFARE AND POPULATION DEVELOPMENT, 1997)**

Juby (2004:581) stated that children in foster care experience great poverty where about half of the children in foster care's parents have trouble meeting their children's basic needs. This has a negative impact on intervention, relationships and dynamics between foster children and their parents, and often leads to abuse, neglect and abandonment. Even though poverty has a strong association with parental abuse, neglect and abandonment, poverty alleviation has received little or no attention in the process of welfare reform.

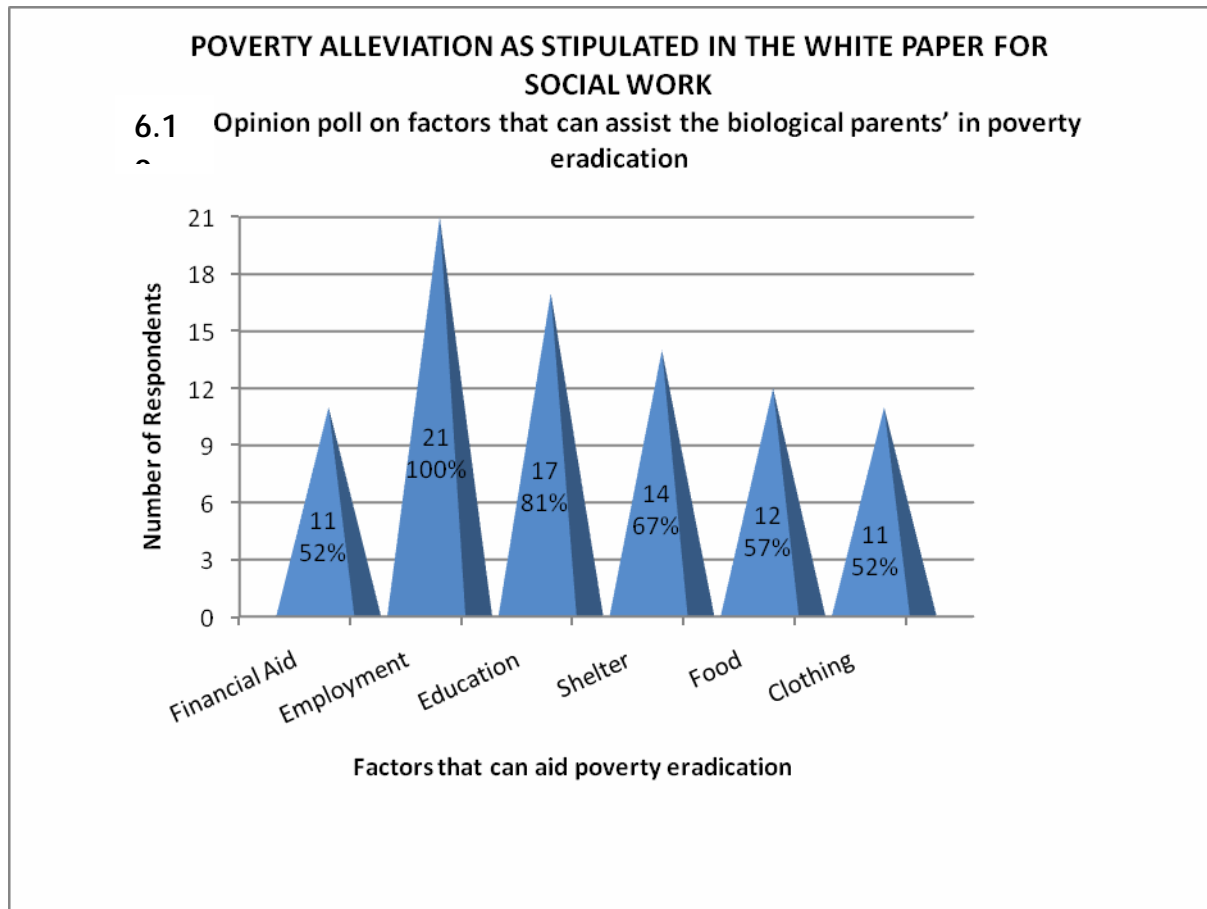
### **6.8.1 Services delivered to assist biological parents in poverty eradication**

The focus in the 21 century according to Whittaker (2002:113) is on poverty alleviation and this is echoed in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997), setting out legislation and the regulations regarding poverty alleviation: providing the vulnerable and poor with available resources, financial assistance and services to eliminate poverty.

Social workers thus have an important task in foster care and reconstruction delivery with poverty alleviation a fundamental undertaking.

The question was therefore asked to determine which services social workers believe are important to assist biological parents in poverty eradication.

As shown in figure 6.10 below social workers have different opinions regarding the necessity of services to eradicate poverty. Eleven (52%) of the respondents assist biological parents in providing financial aid.



**Figure 6.10: Services delivered to assist biological parents in poverty eradication**

- **Assisting biological parents with financial aid**

Although Juby (2004:584-585) states that social workers should provide instrumental support by providing financial aid in the form of material resources, or other necessary financial support to reduce the stress of the family struggling to pay their bills, only eleven (52%) of the social workers render services to improve the family's financial situation. This does not correspond with the literature where financial aid is considered a necessity in service delivery.

- **Finding or acquiring employment opportunities**

Twenty-one (100%) of the respondents assisted biological parents in finding or acquiring employment. This finding corresponds with Potgieter (1998:198-199) who points out that poverty can be eradicated by social workers' assistance through poverty relief programmes giving biological parents the opportunity to understand, identify, organize and develop opportunities for themselves.. Through poverty relief programmes biological parents gain access to economic opportunities where they can own and manage development initiatives creating jobs in their community. Biological parents thus have the chance to be self-employed and financially stable.

- **Assisting biological parents in their education**

Seventeen (81%) of the respondents assist biological parents in their education which reflects their concern for developing these parents' education and skills. This corresponds with Potgieter (1998:198-199) emphasizing the need to deliver the necessary skills to biological parents as a method of improving their education and teaching them valuable skills such as responsible parenting.

Social workers have the responsibility to move away from rescuing families, towards empowering families, focusing on giving the family new knowledge and skills to adjust and improve their social functioning.

- **Assisting biological parents with finding shelter, food parcels and clothing**

Fourteen (67%) respondents assist biological parents in finding adequate shelter, twelve (57%) deliver food parcels and eleven (52%) provide clothing. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) states that biological parents' basic needs (such as adequate shelter, food and clothing) should be met. According to Whittaker (2003:113) in many Child Welfare Agencies parents lack provision for these basic needs. The lack of basic needs has a direct, negative influence on biological parents to care for and eventually be reunited with their children.



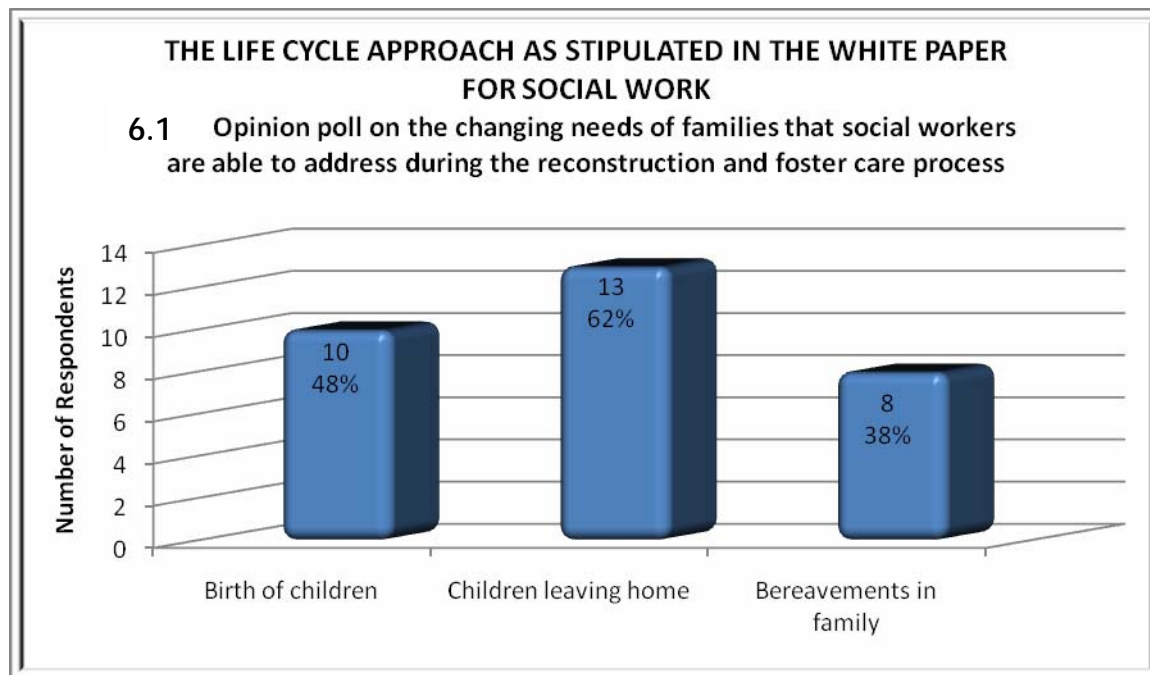
Although the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) states that biological parents basic needs for shelter, food and clothing should be met through social workers acting as a broker by connecting biological parents with resources, many social workers are of the opinion that providing shelter, food and clothing is not necessary in eradicating poverty. Social workers believe that financial aid, employment opportunities and educational training are necessary in eradicating poverty but do not see meeting the basic needs for shelter, food and clothing as an essential service in eradicating poverty.

#### **6.9 THE LIFE CYCLE APPROACH AS STIPULATED IN THE WHITE PAPER FOR SOCIAL WELFARE (MINISTRY FOR WELFARE AND POPULATION DEVELOPMENT, 1997)**

According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) social workers should be aware of the changing needs of children and their families over time.

This was therefore investigated: whether social workers indeed address the changing needs of families during reconstruction and the foster care process. The results are presented in figure 6.11.

### 6.9.1 Addressing the changing needs of families during the reconstruction and foster care process



**Figure 6.11: The changing needs of families social workers are able to address during the reconstruction and foster care process**

- **Addressing the changing needs of families**

Ten (48%) of the respondents address the changing needs of families regarding the birth of children, thirteen (62%) address the changing needs such as children leaving home and eight (38%) address changing needs such as bereavements in the family.

Although Yacoob (2000:1) states that the family's changing needs should be addressed by social workers through recurrent assessment and action planning to accommodate a changing life cycle the majority of the social workers do not believe that the most important changes and transitions that family life presents should be addressed during the reconstruction and foster care process, even though these changes come with challenges and demands which is difficult for the already failing family to deal with.

It can thus be concluded that social workers do not sufficiently address family's changing needs such as the birth of children, children leaving home and bereavements

in the family as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997).

## **6.10 THE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL (2004)**

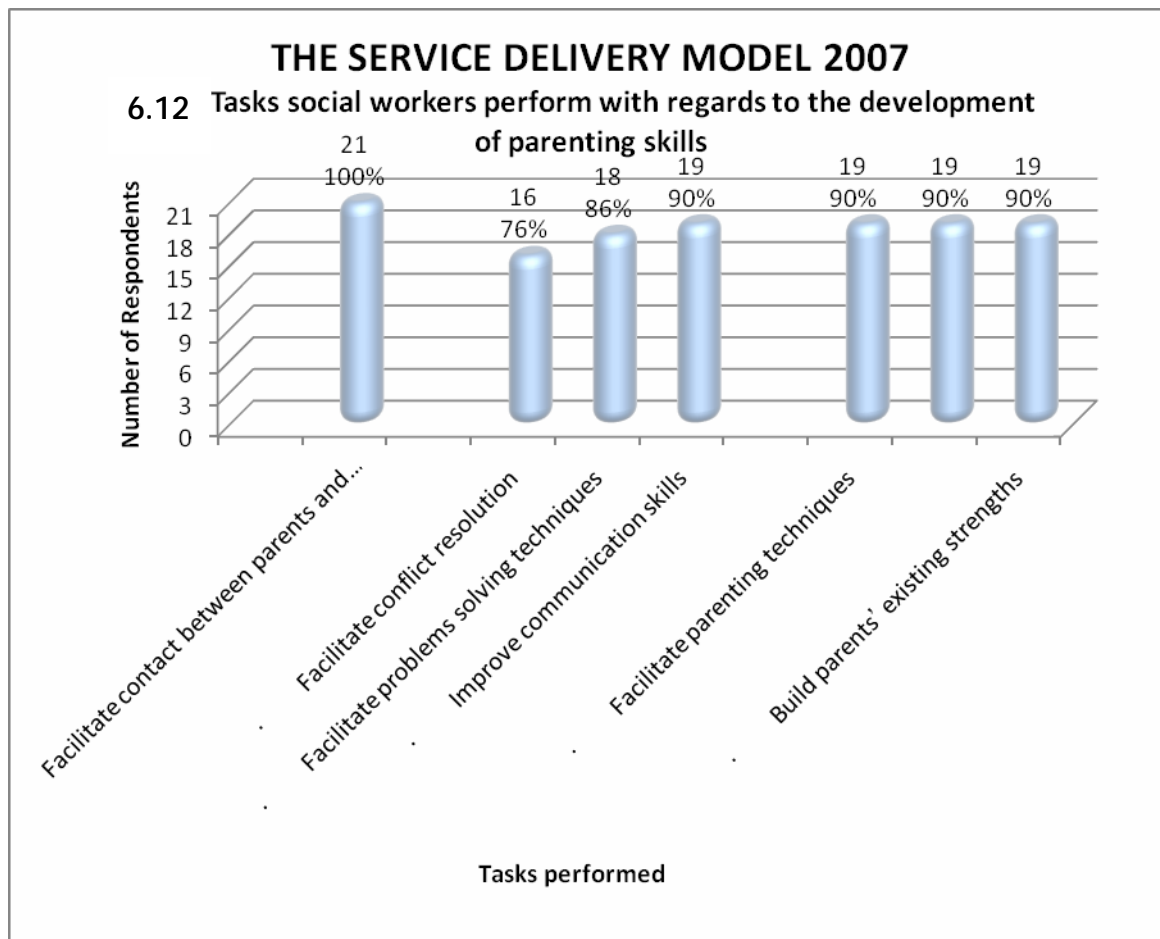
According to the Service Delivery Model (2004) social workers have the responsibility to deliver reconstruction services in accordance with the specific needs of families, to ensure their needs are met and parents improve their ability to take care of their children. According to Wilson (2005:471-472) social workers should deliver parenting skills to biological parents enabling them to take care of their children and address the problems they present during the foster care process.

### **6.10.1 Tasks social workers deliver with regard to the development of parenting skills**

Services regarding parenting, life and general life skills need to be addressed during the foster care process to assist biological parents to their full capacity. The services that social workers deliver with regards to the development of parenting skills were investigated. The results are presented in figure 6.12 below.

- **Facilitating contact between parents and their children**

All (twenty-one or 100%) of the respondents stated that they understand the importance of delivering practical skills such as when they facilitate continuous contact between parents and their children. This finding corresponds with Brown (2006:1499-1508) who explains that social workers should assist families in continuous contact as a method of ensuring the family stay involved and supportive of one another in the process of resolving their problems, conflicts or deficits. The Child Care Act 74 of 1983 emphasizes the importance of social workers appointed to monitor foster care placements to assist biological parents to remain in contact with their children and to work towards returning children to their care.



**Figure 6.12: Tasks social workers deliver with regards to the development of parenting skills**

- **Addressing parent- centred problems**

Sixteen (76%) of the respondents stated that they deliver services which address parent-centred problems such as conflict resolution. The large number of social workers facilitating conflict resolution indicates that social workers understand the need to resolve biological parents conflict situations. This finding thus corresponds with Ogilvie (2005:611) who indicates that many problems are parent-centred which without intervention will lead to biological parents not acquiring the skills to improve their ability to understand and deal with conflict. Facilitating parenting skills will thus assist biological parents to reduce their feelings of stress, sometimes even alleviating their stress which often leads to reduced couple conflict and/or conflict with regards to

parenting, which include self-control training as well as anger management. It can be concluded that resolving parent-centred problems through parenting skills will prevent disruption in their children's development, health and safety.

- **Facilitating problem-solving techniques**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents facilitate problem-solving techniques and nineteen (90%) stated that they deliver services to improve communication skills. These findings corresponds with Ogilvie (2005:611) who indicates that the most common form of intervention includes problem solving and teaching communication skills in families at risk of child abuse, where social workers' teaching of parenting skills improves parents' ability to communicate.

- **Facilitating parenting techniques**

The majority of social workers in facilitating parenting techniques, improve the parents' ability to generate solutions and ideas regarding effective parenting and build on parents' existing strengths. Social work delivery of parent-plus programmes was equally distributed among the different parent-plus programmes regarding the facilitation of parenting techniques with nineteen (96%) of the respondents active in each category.

- **Building parents' existing strengths**

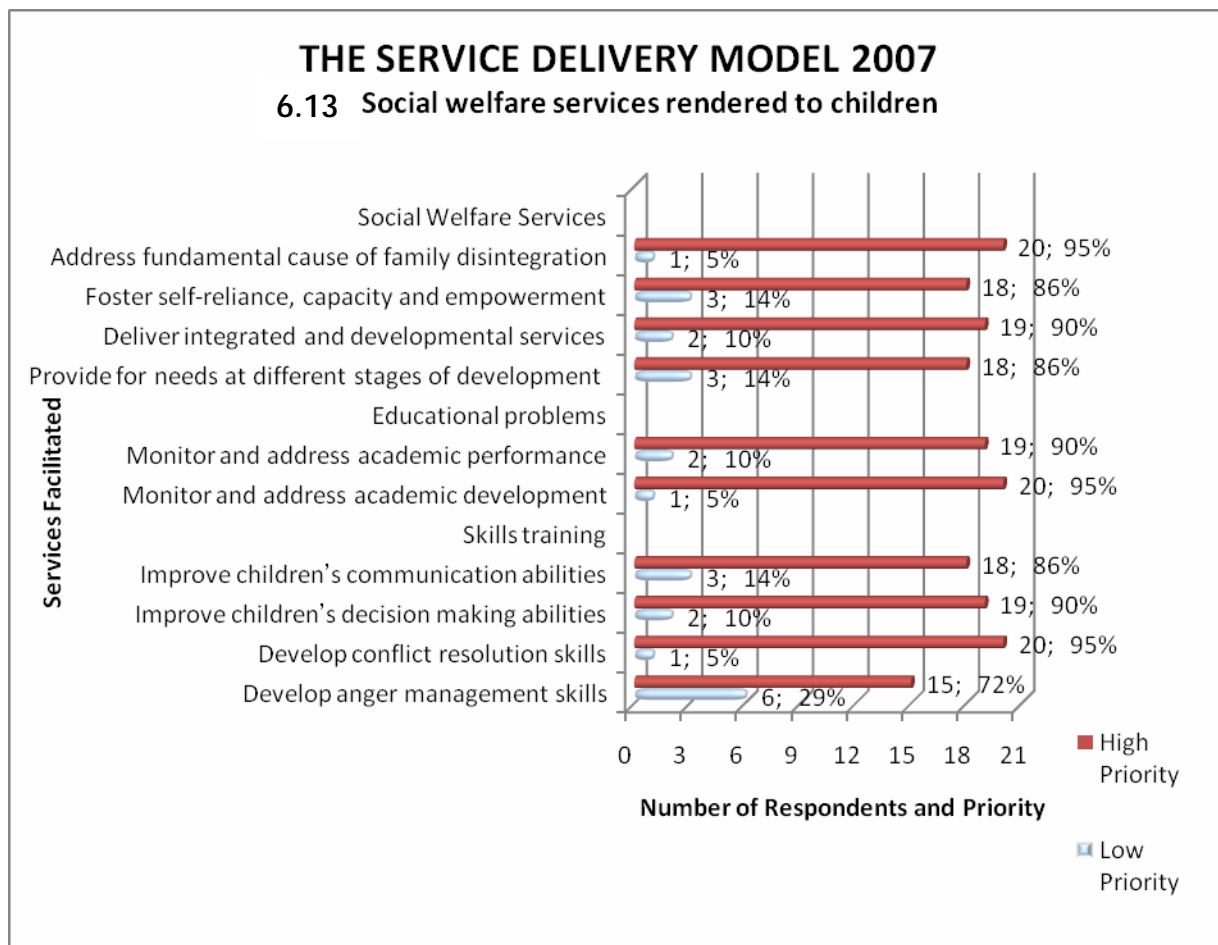
Twelve (57%) of the respondents reported building parents' existing strengths. These findings correspond with the literature where Sharry (2006:107-110) emphasizes the importance of parent-plus programmes, to assist parents on effective parenting techniques and support them in generating their own solutions and ideas, as well as building on their existing strengths.

The solution-focused models empower parents to adopt their own ideas and identify and build upon already existing examples of effective parenting, helping them personalize their own ideas and work out solutions to their unique situation. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) stipulates the importance of focusing on biological parents strengths and their own ability and capacity for growth and change.

From the above findings it can be concluded that the majority of social workers deliver tasks including practical, parent-centred solutions and parent-plus programmes in the process of improving parenting skills, as stipulated in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004).

### 6.10.2 Priorities in services social workers render to children

Another aspect that was investigated was to determine the priorities in social workers' services to children. The various services social workers render to children are presented in figure 6.13.



**Figure 6.13: Services social workers render to children**

- **Addressing the fundamental causes of family disintegration**

The findings reflected in figure 6.13 show that social workers are agreed that the delivery of services to children has a high priority level. Twenty (95%) of the respondents agreed that addressing the fundamental cause of family disintegration is an important service to be rendered.

This finding corresponds with Streak (2005:14) who identifies addressing the fundamental causes of family disintegration as an important service delivered to vulnerable children, and agrees with regulations in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004).

According to Jones (2003:48-49) social workers have a responsibility to address the fundamental causes of family disintegration, assisting children to understand the reasons for their removal and to address possible feelings of anger and resentment against their parents. In this way children will be enabled to develop a relationship with their parents.

- **Services fostering self-reliance, capacity and empowerment**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents in the study delivered services which foster self-reliance, capacity and empowerment. Streak (2005:14) emphasizes the important role social workers play in delivering the abovementioned services, in accordance with the stipulations formulated in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004).

- **Addressing educational problems of children**

Nineteen (90%) of the respondents in the study agreed that the priority level in delivering services to address educational problems of children are important.

- **Addressing academic performance**

Nineteen (90%) of the respondents monitored and addressed academic performance in services to children. These findings correspond with Zetlin (2004:812) who mentions that education plays a key role in the stability of children in foster care as well as in

successful transitions out of the foster care system. Social workers thus need to make sure that academic performance is closely monitored and intervention delivered when necessary. High levels of residential mobility lead to academic difficulties further emphasizing the need for social workers to monitor the academic performance of children in foster care, communicating problems to foster parents and educational staff at new schools. Where educational problems are experienced social workers need to intercede, acting as children's advocates.

- **Addressing academic development**

Almost all (twenty or 95%) of the respondents monitor and address academic development. This finding corresponds with Marzialli (2006:404) who explains that social workers play an important role in children's educational progress and development, being responsible for checking that children are placed in appropriate grades or programmes, and closely monitoring their development in schools.

According to The Department of Social Health Services (2003), social workers play a key role in monitoring and addressing the academic development of foster children. Social workers need to work as part of a responsive and integrated team with teachers to ensure that foster children have access to the same academic resources, services and extra-curricular and enrichment activities as their fellow students.

- **Delivering skills training**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents deliver skills training to improve children's communication ability.

- **Delivering services to improve decision-making abilities**

Nineteen (90%) of the respondents reported delivering services to improve children's decision-making abilities.

- **Delivering services to develop conflict and resolution skills**

Twenty (95%) respondents deliver services to develop conflict and resolution skills.



- **Delivering skills training to develop anger management skills**

Fifteen (71%) deliver skills training to develop anger management skills. The majority of the social workers thus understand the high priority of delivering these skills to children.

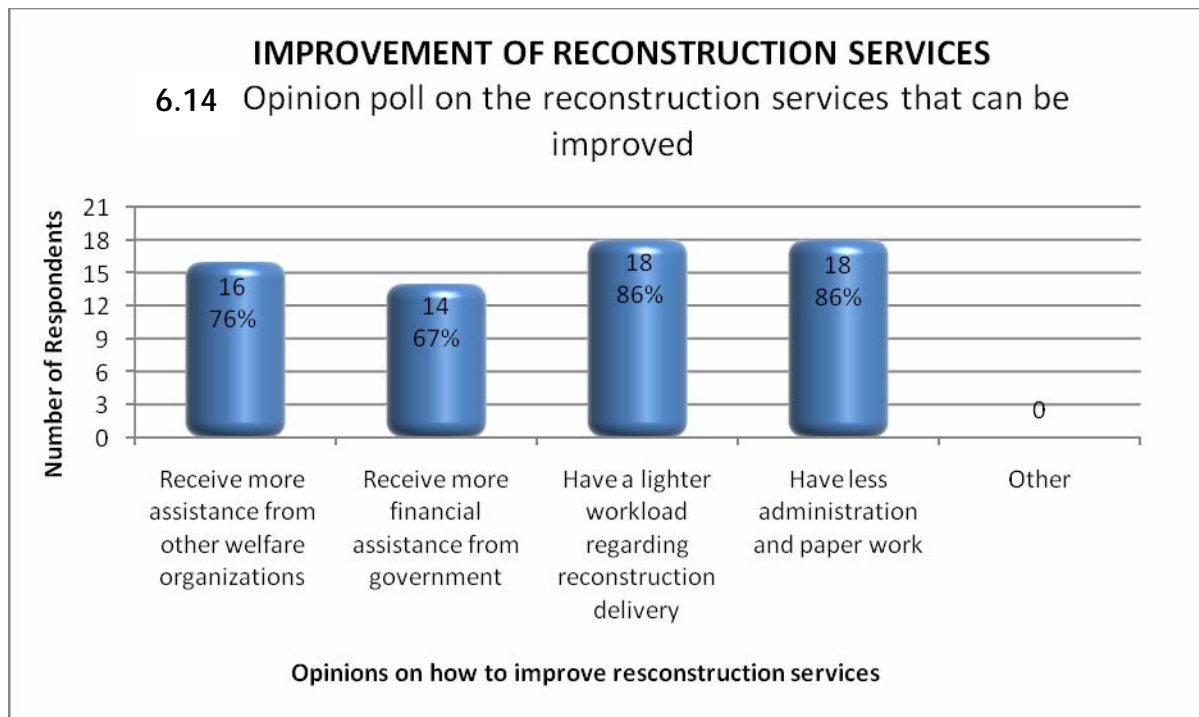
These findings correspond with Donkoh's (2006:2-6) statement that social workers have the responsibility to deliver life skills programmes including communication development, decision making, conflict resolution and anger management skills improving parents' ability to make better decisions regarding their future. Marziali (2006:404) also emphasizes social workers' importance in the delivery of the necessary skills to help children to deal with and understand with their feelings of anger and to assist them in finding alternative methods to develop conflict resolution skills. The majority of the social workers thus understand the importance of delivering social welfare services to children and the majority of social workers indeed deliver services to children and understand that services to children are a priority.

## **6.11 IMPROVEMENT OF RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES**

### **6.11.1 Reconstruction services can be improved**

The question with regards to social workers' opinions of possible improvements in reconstruction service delivery is important in an attempt to understand the possible changes regarding more effective reconstruction service delivery.

As mentioned in the literature review, according to Freundlich and Avery (2005:115-134) the number of social workers in South Africa lacking resources and carrying heavy caseloads is detrimental to their attempts to deliver reconstruction services towards reunification of foster children with their biological parents. Thus the question establishing which reconstruction services can be improved is fundamental in finding ways to improve reconstruction service delivery. The results are presented in figure 6.14.



**Figure 6.14: Reconstruction services can be improved**

- **Assistance from neighbouring welfare organizations**

Sixteen (76%) of the respondents believe that welfare organizations should receive more assistance from neighbouring welfare organizations where cooperation and collaboration can improve effective reconstruction service delivery.

- **Financial assistance from governments**

Fourteen (67%) of the respondents in the study emphasized the need for more financial assistance from governments.

- **A lighter work load**

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents believe that a lighter workload regarding reconstruction delivery could improve their ability to deliver more effective reconstruction services.

Eighteen (86%) of the respondents believe that less administration and paperwork could improve their ability to deliver reconstruction services.

These findings clearly indicate that reconstruction services could improve. The reunification of foster children and biological parents could be done more effectively if social workers received more assistance from welfare organizations, received more financial assistance from government, have a lighter workload regarding reconstruction services and have less administration and paper work.

## **6.12 SUMMARY**

The research findings contained in this chapter reflect the wide scope of the different tasks social workers need to perform during the social work process regarding the assessment and contracting, action, reunification and evaluation phases in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. Most of the findings correlated with the findings of studies conducted by other authors who were referred to in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 of the research, although differences were acknowledged.

The different services social workers deliver during reconstruction to foster children, biological parents and foster families were identified, and the findings clarified the role of the social worker in the various services delivered as stipulated in the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

The findings of the study should give social workers and other professionals greater insight into delivering effective and essential services to enhance foster children's reunification with their biological parents.

The findings can provide social workers and welfare agencies currently working in foster care with some guidelines on how to improve the delivery of services in the different phases of the social work process in an attempt to reunify foster children with their biological parents as soon as possible.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study of the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents originated out of a question regarding the specific reconstruction services social workers render to contribute to this reunification. This chapter will present the conclusions based on the findings of the study, and will make appropriate recommendations based on the conclusions. These recommendations will indicate general guidelines regarding the delivery of reconstruction services to foster children and their biological parents to enhance these children's reunification with their families in the foster care process.

According to Babbie (2001), this report should close with a declaration of what has been discovered about the subject matter and the aim of future research.

#### **7.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the findings of the empirical investigation.

##### **7.2.1 Identifying details and work experience**

The age categories of the respondents who took part in the study were widely distributed. The majority of the respondents rendering services to foster children and biological parents in the foster care process fell in the age category of twenty-four years. There were also respondents aged 26;27;29;31;35;38;39;40;41;44;54 and 57. It was further established that all respondents who took part in the research were females.

From these findings it can be concluded that the general profile of social workers rendering services to foster children and biological parents in the foster care process varies between the age categories, and one characteristic that stands out is the social

worker's gender, as all the respondents who took part in the research were females. The age categories of the respondents imply that social workers have not only recent training but also a measure of life experience.

More than half of the respondents in the study rendering services in the foster care process have a minimum of six years' working experience in rendering services to both foster children and biological parents.

The conclusion can be made that social workers rendering services in the foster care process have sufficient work experience and knowledge regarding foster care, enabling them to render reconstruction services in an attempt to reunify foster children with their biological parents. Knowledge regarding the rendering of both reconstruction and supervision services is imperative in the sufficient delivery of foster care services. The conclusion can thus be made that most of the respondents have the necessary knowledge regarding foster care service delivery.

## **Recommendations**

### **Tasks relating to foster care service delivery:**

- It is recommended that social workers involved in the rendering of reconstruction services in the foster care process should have an adequate amount of work experience regarding foster care service delivery. Sufficient work experience will mean that social workers have the necessary experience, skills and knowledge which are essential in the rendering of effective intervention services in the reunification process in foster care.

### **7.2.2 Services delivered to children, biological parents and foster families**

Most of the respondents in the study described reconstruction and supervision services as part of the foster care services they deliver in their organizations to foster children, biological parents and foster families.

It can be concluded that social workers employed in organizations deliver both reconstruction and supervision services, and have the responsibility to render both

reconstruction and supervision services to promote reunification and provide support to foster families.

### **Recommendation:**

#### **Services aimed at the intervention phase:**

- Social workers should deliver reconstruction services in the foster care process to ensure the prompt return of foster children with their biological parents. Social workers must formulate a case plan identifying the projected reconstruction services including the assessment and delivery of appropriate programmes.
- -Social workers should deliver supervision services in the foster care process to ensure foster families are supported and given the necessary information and skills, enabling them to participate in the reunification process.

#### **7.2.3 Number of social workers rendering reconstruction and supervision services**

Most of the respondents in the study described the number of social workers rendering both reconstruction and supervision services to be inadequate due to heavy caseloads hampering social workers' efforts to deliver effective and therapeutic reconstruction and supervision services in the process of foster care.

From the findings the conclusion can be made that the number of social workers currently rendering both reconstruction and supervision services is not enough to cope with the heavy caseloads of foster children having to be removed and placed in foster care. The insufficient number of social workers rendering reconstruction and supervision services could thus contribute to the long periods of time (more than two years) foster children spend in foster care.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to the recruitment of social workers:**

- Welfare organizations should recruit and employ more social workers with work experience in foster care service delivery to increase the number of social

workers rendering reconstruction and supervision services in welfare organizations, allowing social workers to reduce their caseloads. A reduction in social worker's caseloads will enable social workers to provide more therapeutic services to foster children, biological parents and foster families in the foster care process.

- Government should support welfare organizations financially, increasing the capacity of welfare organizations to employ more social workers..

#### **7.2.4 The delivery of reconstruction services to enhance the prompt return of children**

More than half of the respondents could not deliver reconstruction services because of insufficient time, heavy caseloads as well as the lack of resources in organizations. Three respondents (n=21) implied that parents lack of life skills, their inability to understand their responsibilities and tasks in taking care of their children, further prevents social workers from rendering reconstruction services. It can be concluded that all these aspects factors severely limit the social worker's ability to render effective reconstruction services in an attempt to reunify foster children with their biological parents as soon as possible.

#### **Recommendation**

##### **Tasks relating to reconstruction delivery:**

- Social workers should have lighter caseloads, which would leave them more time to deliver the necessary reconstruction services to enhance the return of children to their biological parents.
- Social workers should, through building new relationships and cooperating with other welfare organizations delivering foster care services, increase the availability and number of resources to assist foster children and their biological parents in their reunification. Resources include sharing knowledge and skills regarding reconstruction delivery between welfare organizations.
- Social workers should deliver parenting skills in all cases of statutory removal whereby parents should have the opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills

in their parental role, improving their ability to take responsibility and find new methods of taking care of their children.

### **7.2.5 The delivery of fragmented and ineffective reconstruction services**

The delivery of reconstruction services is fragmented because of the lack in cooperation among welfare organizations. The majority of the respondents felt that reconstruction services are fragmented and ineffective because of the lack in cooperation between parents and social workers in the delivery of reconstruction services in foster care.

It can be concluded that social workers rendering reconstruction services are unable to render effective reconstruction services due to biological parents inability to cooperate with social workers in the foster care process, which in turn leads to a fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services.

This finding does not agree with the findings in literature where the Financing Policy (1999) points to the lack of cooperation between welfare organizations as the primary factor associated with fragmented and ineffective reconstruction service delivery, as opposed to the lack of cooperation between parents and social workers.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to the assessment phase:**

- Social workers should already in the assessment phase when a contract is formulated identify exactly the role biological parents should play in reconstruction delivery. Social workers should specify the tasks and responsibilities of biological parents in an attempt to obtain their cooperation and collaboration with social workers in the foster care process.

### **7.2.6 Different levels of prevention services**

Seven of the respondents (n=21) reported delivering primary prevention services (stopping abuse before it starts) as well as delivering secondary prevention services (preventing ongoing abuse). Thirteen of the respondents (n=21) reported delivering



tertiary prevention services (reacting to existing abuse and neglect). This indicates that many of the social workers do not deliver primary, secondary or tertiary prevention services in the foster care process, even though it is considered by authors as being a vital component of the assessment phase.

It can thus be concluded that most social workers do not deliver prevention services even though prevention services are imperative in preventing children from being removed from their parents. The incapability of social workers delivering prevention services severely limits foster children's opportunities to remain with their biological parents in a family environment, and children are removed because of a lack in prevention services rendered by social workers.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to prevention services:**

- The social worker should assess whether children have been victims of abandonment or neglect and deliver the appropriate prevention services to stop abuse before it starts. Prevention services should also be delivered to prevent ongoing abuse or reactions to existing abuse in an attempt to prevent statutory removal of foster children from their biological parents whilst simultaneously enhancing foster children's opportunity to remain with their family.

### **7.2.7 Time and resources during prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention**

More than half of the respondents reported that they do not have sufficient time or resources to deliver prevention, early intervention or statutory intervention services.

From these findings it can be concluded that social workers do not have enough time or resources to deliver prevention services. Heavy caseloads limit social workers time to deliver early intervention services. Also limited is the number of social workers employed to assess, support and empower clients during prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention.

Administrative duties such as court appearances further inhibit social workers from delivering statutory intervention services due to the long time spent doing paper and administrative work, leaving very little time for prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention services. From the findings it can be concluded that the insufficient time social workers have to deliver prevention services and the lack of resources are continuously negatively influencing social workers' ability to render prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention services.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention services:**

- Social workers should identify and categorize child abuse and or/neglect victims into two categories; foster children at risk of abuse and or/neglect is placed in one category and children that have already suffered from abuse and or/neglect placed in the second category. Social workers rendering prevention services should be given the tasks and responsibility to deliver services to either children placed in category one or children placed in category two. This will enable social workers to render only primary intervention (working with children at risk of abuse/neglect); or rendering only secondary and tertiary prevention (to foster children already subjected to abuse/neglect). These specified prevention services will enable social workers to have a lighter caseload and they will have enough time to render effective, therapeutic intervention services in an attempt to avoid the statutory removal of foster children from their families.

#### **7.2.8 Time frames in the delivery of reunification services**

The majority of the respondents highlighted that they render reunification services only for one or two weeks after the statutory removal of children. From the findings it can be concluded that most of the respondents do not deliver reunification services immediately after the removal of foster children from their biological parents.

This could severely inhibit foster children and their families from adjusting after the foster care placement because of the lack of assistance from social workers in helping both foster children and biological parents in their new situations.

The incapability of social workers rendering reunification services immediately after the statutory removal of children could further detract from the role of the social worker as a mediator in arranging for foster children to have contact with their biological parents.

It can thus be concluded that in cases where both foster children and biological parents do not receive immediate reunification services in an attempt to enhance the prompt return of the children to their families, the reunification process could be delayed because of the lack of assistance from social workers.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to reunification services:**

- Social workers should immediately implement reunification services at the time of removal of foster children from their biological parents. The immediate delivery of reunification services will enhance both foster children and biological parents opportunities to retain contact and build on their relationship whilst addressing the problems that led to the initial removal of children from their parental homes, improving their chances of reuniting.

### **7.2.9 Tasks performed during the social work process**

Most of the respondents performed tasks which included assessing foster children and biological parents problems as well as identifying and providing the necessary resources available to children and parents during the assessment phase.

The majority of the respondents agreed to examine the willingness of families to commit to reconstruction services in the process of reunifying children with their families. A contract is drawn up to clarify tasks and responsibilities of foster children, biological parents and social workers during reconstruction and intervention services to be rendered.

Most of the respondents reported tasks motivating and enhancing the interaction between the biological parents and foster children in the action phase.

Eleven of the respondents (n=21) reported that they discussed the exact date and place of reunification in the reunification phase. Fifteen of the respondents stated that they discussed exactly how reunification would take place.

Generally the majority of the respondents reported tasks identifying the goals achieved, aspects still needing to be addressed as well as new problems to be addressed, in the evaluation phase

In the termination phase the majority of the social workers reported reaching the agreed- upon goals for reunification. Only fourteen of the respondents however, stated that they continued delivering services in the termination phase.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this section. First, there are several tasks social workers must deliver during the six phases of the social work process. In the first phase of assessment it can be concluded that respondents assess problems of foster children and biological parents and provide them with the necessary resources and knowledge to understand their problems. In the second phase (assessment and contract phase) social workers identify the willingness of families to commit to reconstruction services, enabling social workers to establish whether biological parents are indeed willing to change their behaviour and attitude towards taking care of their children.

It can be concluded that social workers utilize the contract to contribute to foster children and biological parents' awareness of their role in the reunification process and at the same time clearly to identify which intervention services will be rendered to prepare foster children and their families before the start of services, clarifying their expectations, ideas and thoughts on these services..

Another conclusion is that social workers in the action phase both motivate and enhance interaction between foster children and biological parents to get them to communicate, sharing their feelings (both positive and negative) in an attempt to enhance their chances of reunification.

It can further be concluded that social workers in the reunification phase do address issues such as the date and place of reunification. This could lead to both foster children and biological parents understanding and being aware of the exact steps, their individual roles and the responsibilities to be taken in the process of reunification in foster care.

The conclusion can be made that the majority of the respondents in the evaluation phase did identify the goals to be achieved as well as the aspects and new problems to be addressed. Social workers thus ensure that both foster children and biological parents are aware of the possible problems that could inhibit them from being reunited. Foster children and biological parents are shown different ways in which to address these problems to ensure both groups can be reunited as soon as possible.

Finally it can also be concluded that social workers indeed find ways to reach agreed-upon goals, but do not continue with sessions after termination which could lead to integration problems., Both foster children and biological parents experience problems after reunification, which, if not addressed by the social worker could result in a recurrence where children yet again need to be removed from their parental home.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to the social work process:**

- Social workers must discuss the exact date and place of reunification in the reunification phase enabling both foster children and their biological parents to be aware of the changes they need to make before the deadline for reunification. Setting an exact date will thus prevent both foster children and their biological parents from being unprepared.
- Social workers should in their preparation for terminating services to both foster children and their biological parents include the continuation of services to ensure that both children and their parents are assisted in the reunification process. Social workers have to assist both the children and the parents to adjust to the new challenges and possible problems they may encounter with the reintegration of the family.

### **7.2.10 Time period of service delivery after the termination phase**

More than half of the respondents participating in the research reported not delivering any services after the termination phase. The conclusion can be made that social workers do not render any services after terminating sessions with both foster children and biological parents. This could lead to numerous problems in the family. Both foster children and biological parents may develop problems during their reunification, which, if not addressed by the social worker could escalate, leaving children and parents once more with a situation where there is no support, and overwhelming problems, resulting in children being removed. Social workers thus need to deliver services for at least six months after the termination phase. The reunification of foster children with biological parents should be closely monitored, while social workers assist the family to adjust to reunification.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to the termination phase:**

- The social worker should in all cases of family reunification render services for at least six months afterwards, to ensure that both foster children and biological parents are supported in the process of reintegration, and to facilitate any possible problems or obstacles preventing them from establishing appropriate parent-child relationships.

### **7.2.11 Services delivered during foster care and supervision**

It can be concluded that the majority of respondents in the research deliver the following services during foster care and supervision. Most respondents prepared the foster family for children's integration into the new family to help foster children with their initial family adjustment. Eighteen of the respondents (n=21) prepared the foster family for children's possibly negative reactions to the foster care placement and to develop an understanding of such negativity.

Most of the respondents assisted foster parents with decision making, especially with regards to choosing an appropriate school for foster children. Eighteen of the

respondents (n=21) ensured continuous contact between foster children and biological parents in order to aid the development of a healthy relationship between children and their families.

Almost all the respondents assisted families not only to obtain the foster care grant, but also to manage their expenditures appropriately in order to ensure foster children are cared for as regards their basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing.

It can be concluded that most of the social workers indeed rendered the above-mentioned services to foster children, biological parents and foster families during foster care and supervision.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to foster care and supervision services:**

- Social workers should at all times facilitate continuous contact between foster children and their biological parents to ensure that both parties receive sufficient time and opportunities to improve their relationship, and address the problems that inhibit them from having a positive, caring and loving relationship.
- Social workers should also assist the foster family in the delivery of supervision services to help the family understand the purpose of the foster care grant. Social workers need to discuss the manner in which foster families should utilize the money obtained from the foster care grant where providing for foster children's basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter is fundamental in taking care of the foster children.

### **7.2.12 Services delivered during the reconstruction process**

More than half of the respondents reported that they deliver professional counselling, rehabilitation programmes and specified skills development during the reconstruction process.

It can be concluded that the respondents understand their responsibilities and tasks in rendering the abovementioned services, delivering intervention services such as

counselling, various programmes and skills development in the process of reconstruction to improve the parents ability to address and overcome their problems which prevent them from being reunited with their children.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to the reconstruction process:**

- Social workers should in the delivery of the reconstruction process ensure that sufficient professional counselling, rehabilitation programmes and specified skills development services are rendered. The delivery of these services will enable biological parents through the help of a social worker to understand their problems and possible reasons for abusing and/ or neglecting their children whilst at the same time receiving the opportunity to learn new skills to avoid continuing with the patterns of abuse and or/neglect.

### **Rendering of reconstruction services according to time frames**

It can be concluded that most of the respondents do not render reconstruction services immediately after the removal of children from their biological parents. Merely two of the respondents (n=21) reported rendering reconstruction services to children and biological parents between 1-4 weeks after the children were removed. The lack of reconstruction services could lessen biological parents opportunities to change their behaviour, especially since biological parents are motivated and more receptive to change immediately after their children's removal.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to the delivery of reconstruction services:**

- The social worker should be sensitive to and recognize the biological parent's level of motivation after the removal of their children. The social worker should encourage biological parents to change their behaviour through the rendering of reconstruction services immediately after the removal of children in an attempt to



use their optimism as a contributing factor that will enforce changes in their behaviour.

### **7.2.13 Services delivered to foster children**

It can be concluded that most of the social workers do render the following services to foster children, including integrating foster children into foster families, focusing on children's strengths, ensuring foster children understand the reasons for being removed from biological parents and addressing foster children's education, health and social needs. However, it can be concluded that social workers do not teach foster children the necessary life skills, as only thirteen of the respondents reported rendering these skills. In conclusion it can thus be said that social workers render reconstruction delivery to foster children but do not spend enough time on rendering life skills.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to reconstruction services:**

- Social workers should determine the need for rendering life skills to foster children in order to develop the necessary life skills. Teaching necessary skills will enable foster children to make informed decisions, improve coping mechanisms during conflict situations with biological parents as well as helping them to grow out of foster care and become independent, while they improve their self-esteem and self-reliance.

### **7.2.14 Tasks performed during reconstruction service delivery**

It can be concluded that more than half of the respondents did not perform the necessary tasks during reconstruction delivery. Only twelve of the social workers formulated a documented plan and only a further thirteen included time frames for possible reunification in the delivery of reconstruction services. Fourteen respondents included time frames for review regarding foster children's progress in foster care and only four of the respondents delivered programmes during reconstruction. The conclusion is thus that social workers do not deliver the necessary tasks which they are

responsible for during reconstruction service delivery, regarding formulating a documented plan, including time frames for possible reunification as well as establishing the progress foster children are making during their foster care placement and stipulating possible programmes to be delivered.

The inability of social workers to establish time frames to determine foster children's progress has the consequence that social workers are not aware of children's specific needs, challenges and problems preventing them from being reunited with their families. Social workers are therefore not providing additional or appropriate services to achieve stability to reunite foster children with their biological parents.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to reconstruction delivery:**

- The social worker should formulate a documented plan in every case of statutory removal where the steps to be taken in the reunification of foster children with biological parents are clearly described in order to make both foster children and biological parents aware of the necessary tasks to be completed in the reunification process.
- The social worker should determine the time frames of foster children's possible reunification with their families according to both children and parents' progress in resolving their problems and obstacles which led to the initial removal of the children. Time frames should help both foster children and biological parents to understand which goals should be achieved by which date. The foster children's progress or lack of progress must be reviewed by social workers in order to establish whether reconstruction services rendered are sufficient or whether they need to be altered to enhance the children's chances of reunification with their biological parents.
- To monitor how foster children have accomplished milestones set out in case plans social workers must use programmes as a method to establish the foster children's progress in reaching the agreed-upon goals as stipulated in each programme. Only if social workers review foster children's progress can both the

social worker and foster children understand the areas of dysfunction that need to be addressed.

### **7.2.15 Tasks performed during reconstruction services**

All the respondents who took part in the research performed the necessary tasks during reconstruction. The majority of the participants investigated the causes of children being removed from their parental home as well as addressing the causes for their removal. Most of the respondents reported rendering counselling both before and after reunification.

From these findings it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents performed the tasks including investigating and addressing the causes of foster children's removal from their parental home in an attempt to avoid a recurrence of family disintegration. It can also be concluded that most of the respondents reported rendering counselling before and after reunification in order to resolve problems that led to the foster care placement and to avoid integration and adaptation problems with the return of the children.

### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks during reconstruction:**

- Social workers have a responsibility to investigate the reasons why children are removed from their parental home in an attempt to understand the reasons why children were abused and or/neglected. Understanding the reasons for the abuse and/or neglect will empower social workers to assist the family to understand the reasons and help the family find ways to cope with their problems, thereby avoiding the recurrence of abuse and/or neglect.
- Social workers should deliver counselling to children and their parents before and after reunification to ensure that both children and their families have addressed the problems that led to the family's disintegration as well as prepare the family for the children's integration into the family. Counselling thus provides the family

with sufficient coping mechanisms to avoid the recurrence of family disintegration.

#### **7.2.16 Principles social workers implement**

It can be concluded that the majority of the respondents reported being responsive to children's culture and age when choosing foster care placements. Most of the respondents made assessments of foster parents' cultural background and financial stability to ensure the foster families' environment and home were suitable and their level of fitness appropriate, providing a safe and stable home for foster children.

The conclusion can thus be made that the majority of the social workers do adhere to and implement the principles as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997).

#### **Recommendation**

#### **Tasks relating to the principles stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997):**

- Social workers should determine the foster families' culture, age and financial stability before placing children there. Only if the foster family have the ability to provide an environment similar to that of the foster children regarding their cultural identity as well as to provide for the financial needs of the foster children should social workers place children with the new foster family.

#### **7.2.17 Services delivered to eradicate poverty**

It can be concluded that even though poverty eradication is an essential service social workers should deliver according to the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) social workers do not agree on the specific services necessary for poverty eradication.

Most of the respondents rendered services including assisting biological parents in finding employment and assisting parents in their education. However, it can be concluded that most of the respondents did not deliver services to improve biological

parents financial aid nor did most of the respondents deliver any poverty eradication services to assist biological parents in finding adequate shelter, food and clothing. From these findings it can be concluded that social workers help biological parents acquire employment and assist with their education, but do not deliver sufficient services to provide financial aid or meet their basic needs such as for shelter, food and clothing in the eradication of poverty.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to poverty eradication:**

- The social worker has a responsibility to determine the financial needs of the biological parents, especially regarding their basic needs such as for food, shelter and clothing and in general to provide financial aid.
- The social worker should assist biological parents in the delivery of food parcels for an agreed number of months. The social worker should also be the mediator during the foster care process in acquiring clothing and assisting biological parents to identify and find the necessary resources, facilities or organizations where they can either receive or buy clothing at a reasonable price.
- The social worker should determine the biological parents' need for shelter and assist them in acquiring appropriate shelter for their families. Finally it is imperative that the social worker assess the financial circumstances of the biological parents in order to establish which financial needs they have. Here the social worker can act as a broker to provide financial aid in the form of material resources or other necessary financial support to improve the family's financial situation. Financial support will enable biological parents to focus their attention on being reunited with their children, and not to be preoccupied with their lack of financial stability to support and take care of their family.

### **7.2.18 Changing needs addressed during reconstruction services**

The conclusion can be made that social workers do not address the changing needs of families during reconstruction service delivery as indicated by the Life Cycle Approach and as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and

Population Development, 1997). Most of the respondents did not address the changing needs of families during transitions such as the birth of children, children leaving home and bereavements in the family.

The conclusion can thus be made that social workers do not address the changing needs of families, even though these changes in family life come with numerous challenges and demands which are difficult for the already failing family to cope with.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to the life cycle approach:**

- Social workers should during the foster care process be aware of the changing needs of families as indicated by the Life Cycle Approach, and as stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Addressing the different changes and challenges the family encounter during major transitions in their life will ensure that the families can cope with any additional changes in their lives.

### **7.2.19 Tasks delivered regarding parenting skills**

Most of the respondents that participated in the research reported delivering tasks regarding practical skills delivery in the development of parenting skills. Most of the respondents reported facilitating contact between parents and their children as stipulated in the delivery of practical skills. More than half of the respondents reported addressing and delivering parent-centred problems through the delivery of tasks including facilitating conflict resolution, problem-solving techniques and improving communication skills.

More than half of the respondents reported delivering parent-plus programmes where they facilitate parenting techniques, improve parents ability to be effective parents when they are empowered to generate their own solutions and ideas regarding effective parenting, and build on parents' existing strengths.

From these findings it can thus be concluded that more than half of the respondents delivered the necessary tasks with regard to the development of parenting skills, addressing parent-centred problems and rendering parent-plus programmes.

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to the development of parenting skills:**

- Social workers should continue to deliver the necessary tasks in developing parenting skills through the delivery of practical skills, parent-centred problems and delivering parent-plus programmes to ensure that parents' have the necessary parenting skills to take care of their children. Improving parents skills to understand their children and generate their own solutions and ideas regarding effective parenting, resolving conflict situations, implementing problem-solving techniques and improving their communication skills to ensure that the parent-child relationship are improved, are all the tasks to be delivered by social workers.

### **7.2.20 Welfare services delivered to children**

It can be concluded that the majority of the social workers found that the delivery of services to children is a priority. More than half of the respondents reported delivering welfare services to children to address the fundamental causes of family disintegration, to foster self-reliance, capacity building and empowerment.

Most of the respondents reported delivering services through an integrated, comprehensive and developmental approach and to provide for children's needs according to their different stages of development. More than half of the respondents reported delivering welfare services to address educational problems and rendering skills training to foster children.

The conclusion is thus that most of the respondents delivered welfare services to facilitate the delivery of services to children as stipulated in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2004).

## **Recommendation**

### **Tasks relating to the delivery of services to children:**

- Social workers should determine which welfare services should be delivered to children in the foster care process.
- Social workers should however in the delivery of services to children address the fundamental cause of family disintegration, to foster self-reliance, capacity and the empowerment of children.
- Social workers should at all times deliver these services through an integrated, comprehensive and developmental approach and provide for children's needs according to their different stages of development.
- Social workers should also monitor and address foster children's academic performance and development.
- Social workers further have the responsibility to improve foster children's communication and decision-making abilities and to develop their conflict resolution and anger management skills.

#### **7.2.21 The improvement of reconstruction services**

Most of the respondents reported that welfare organizations must receive more assistance especially financial, from the government. The majority of the respondents felt that social workers should receive a lighter workload regarding reconstruction delivery and have to do less administration and paper work. It can thus be concluded that the majority of the respondents agreed that the social workers ability to deliver reconstruction services would improve if the welfare agency received more financial assistance, have a lighter workload and less administration and paper work to leave them more time to render services to foster children, biological parents and foster families.



### **7.2.22 Future research**

In the light of the results of this exploratory and descriptive investigation with regard to the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents, it is suggested that future research should focus on the specific reconstruction services that could increase the probability of foster children returning to their biological parents. This may decrease the high number of foster children currently staying in foster care for longer than the restricted period of two years.

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**(ANNEXURE A)****UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH****DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK****STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE****The role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents.**

All the information recorded in the questionnaire will be regarded as strictly confidential. The names and individual views of respondents will not be made known.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Please answer all the questions.
2. Be as honest and open as possible.

**CONCEPTUALISATION**

Reconstruction services: Any services rendered with the intent on returning children in foster care to their parents.

Supervision services: Supervision services are an imperative function of social workers involving the social worker visiting the foster parents and foster children to implement reconstruction services and also monitor the progress of the families in resolving their problems.

Prevention services: Social work services provided to families with children in order to strengthen and build their capacity and self-reliance to address problems that may or are bound to occur in the family environment which, if unhindered may lead to statutory intervention.

Early intervention services: Social worker services provided to families where children are identified being at risk of harm or removal into alternative care. Intervention services are delivered in order to avoid such interference.

**Please complete the following questions:**

### **1. IDENTIFYING DETAILS**

1.1 Age: \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 How long have you been practicing social work?

<b>Work experience regarding foster care service delivery</b>	
0 - 1 year	
2 - 3 years	
4 - 5 years	
6 - 7 years	
8 - 9 years	
10 – 11 years	
10 years and more	

### **2. RECONSTRUCTION AND SUPERVISION SERVICES RENDERED**

2.1 Which of the following services are you rendering in your organization as part of foster care services to children and their biological parents?

<b>Services Rendered</b>	
Reconstruction services	
Supervision services	

- 2.2 What is your opinion regarding the number of social workers in your organization assigned to rendering reconstruction and supervision services?

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### 3. RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES IN FOSTER CARE

- 3.1 How do you think reconstruction service delivery in the foster care process is enhancing the prompt return of children to their families according to the Child Care Act 74 of 1983?

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- 3.2 Which factors in your opinion are contributing to fragmented and ineffective delivery of reconstruction services?

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### 4. THE SOCIAL WORKER'S ROLE IN THE STATUTORY REMOVAL PROCESS

- 4.1 On which of the following is the emphasis placed when the different levels of prevention services are offered?

Prevention services	
Primary (Stopping abuse/neglect before it starts)	
Secondary (Preventing ongoing abuse with already identified abused children)	
Tertiary (Delivering services in order to react to existing abuse and neglect)	

- 4.2 What is your opinion about the time and resources that are available during the process of prevention, early intervention and statutory intervention (reunification services)?

Prevention Services	Sufficient	Insufficient	Uncertain
Time			
Resources			
Early Intervention Services			
Time			
Resources			
Statutory Intervention (Reunification Services)			
Time			
Resources			

## 5. STATUTORY INTERVENTION PROCESS

- 5.1 According to which of the following time frames are reunification services rendered to children and their biological families by the organization?

Reunification services	
One week after statutory removal	
Between 1 - 2 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 3 – 4 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 5 – 6 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 7 - 8 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 9 – 10 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 11 – 12 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 13 – 14 weeks after statutory removal	
Between 15 – 16 weeks after statutory removal	
Other	



## 6. THE SOCIAL WORK PROCESS IN RECONSTRUCTION SERVICE DELIVERY

6.1 Which of the following tasks do you perform during the phases of the social work process?

Phases	
Assessment phase	
• Assess the foster children and biological parents' problems	
• Identify and provide resources available	
Assessment and contracting phase	
• Identify the willingness of families to commit to reconstruction services	
• Drawing up a contract clarifying both foster children, biological parents and social worker's tasks and responsibilities during reconstruction	
• Identify which intervention services will be rendered during reconstruction service delivery	
Action phase	
• Motivating both foster children and biological parents to communicate and interact during reconstruction delivery	
• Enhancing the interaction between foster children and biological parents to improve and establish the progress in their communication abilities and relationship	
Reunification phase	
• Discussing the date when reunification will take place	
• Discuss exactly how reunification will take place	
• Discuss exactly where reunification will take place	
Evaluation phase	
• Identify which goals have been achieved	
• Identify which aspects still need to be addressed	
• Identify new problems that need to be addressed	

Termination phase	
• Reached agreed upon goals for reunification	
• Continue with sessions	
• Discontinue sessions	

6.2 After the termination phase, for which period of time are services to children and biological parents continued?

Duration of services	
None	
1 - 4 weeks	
5 - 8 weeks	
9 - 12 weeks	
13 - 16 weeks	
17 - 20 weeks	
21 - 24 weeks	

## 7. SERVICES TO FOSTER FAMILIES, BIOLOGICAL PARENTS AND FOSTER CHILDREN

7.1 Which of the following services do social workers deliver during foster care and supervision?

Services	
Preparation of foster family for foster children's integration into new family	
Preparation of foster family for foster children's possibly negative reactions to placement	
Assisting foster parents in decision making regarding foster children's choice of school.	
Ensuring continuous contact of foster children with biological parents	
Ensuring facilitation to obtain and use the foster care grant	

## 8. RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES TO BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

8.1 Which of the following services do social workers render during the reconstruction process as stipulated by order of the children's court?

Services rendered	
Professional counselling	
Rehabilitation programmes	
Specified skills development	

8.2 According to which of the following time frames are reconstruction services rendered to children and their biological families by the organization?

Time Frame	
Between 1-4 weeks	
Between 5-8 weeks	
Between 9-12 weeks	
Between 13-16 weeks	
Between 17-20 weeks	
2 years	

## 9. RECONSTRUCTION SERVICE DELIVERY TO FOSTER CHILDREN

9.1 Which of the following services do social workers render to foster children?

Services delivered	
Integrating foster children into the foster family	
Focusing on foster children's strengths	
Ensuring foster children understand the original reasons for leaving their family	
Addressing educational, health and social needs of foster children	
Teaching foster children life skills	

9.2 Which of the following tasks in reconstruction services do social workers perform as stipulated in the documented plan referred to by the Child Care Act 74 of 1983?

<b>Services</b>	
Formulate a documented plan	
Include time frames for possible reunification	
Include time frames for reviews regarding progress of children	
Stipulate the possible programmes to be delivered during reconstruction	

## 10. THE NATURE OF RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES

10.1 In your opinion which of the following tasks are social workers performing during reconstruction social work services?

<b>Social Work Tasks</b>	
Investigate the reasons why children are removed from their parental home	
Address the reasons why children are removed from their parental home	
Provide counselling to children and their parents before reunification	
Provide counselling to children and their parents after reunification	

## 11. FOSTER CARE AND RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES RENDERED ACCORDING TO THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVES

11.1 Which of the following principles stipulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) do you think social workers implement?

Principles	
To be responsive to cultural differences in choosing placements	
To assess the prospective family regarding their level of fitness with regards to:	
• Cultural background	
• Religion	
• Financial stability	

## 12. POVERTY ALLEVIATION AS STIPULATED IN THE WHITE PAPER FOR SOCIAL WORK

12.1 In your opinion, which of the following can assist the biological parents in poverty eradication?

Assistance	
Financial Aid	
Employment	
Education	
Shelter	
Food	
Clothing	

### 13. THE LIFE CYCLE APPROACH AS STIPULATED IN THE WHITE PAPER FOR SOCIAL WORK

13.1 In your opinion which of the following changing needs of families (e.g. birth of children, children leaving home and bereavements) are social workers able to address during the reconstruction and foster care process?

Changing needs	
Birth of children	
Children leaving home	
Bereavements in family	

### 14. THE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL 2007

14.1 Which of the following tasks do social workers deliver with regards to the development of parenting skills?

Tasks	
<b>Practical skills</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate contact between parents and their children</li> </ul>	
<b>Parent-centred problems</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate conflict resolution</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate problem-solving techniques</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve communication skills</li> </ul>	
<b>Parent Plus Programmes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate parenting techniques</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve parents' ability to generate solutions and ideas regarding effective parenting</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build parents' existing strengths</li> </ul>	

14.2 Which of the following social welfare services do social workers facilitate in the delivery of services to children?

Social welfare services	Priority Level	
	Low	High
• To address the fundamental cause of family disintegration		
• To foster self-reliance, capacity and empowerment		
• To deliver services through an integrated, comprehensive and developmental approach		
• To provide for children's needs according to their different stages of development		
Educational problems		
• To monitor and address academic performance		
• To monitor and address academic development		
Skills training		
• To improve children's communication abilities		
• To improve children's decision-making abilities		
• To develop conflict resolution skills		
• To develop anger management skills		

## 15. IMPROVEMENT OF RECONSTRUCTION SERVICES

15.1 In your opinion, which of the following reconstruction services can be improved?

Improved reconstruction services	
To receive more assistance from other welfare organizations	
To receive more financial assistance from government	
To have a lighter workload regarding reconstruction delivery	
To have less administration and paper work	
Other	

Any other comments

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.**



**(ANNEXURE B)**

Student: Angelique de Villiers

Faculty: Social Work Department

University: Stellenbosch

Study Leader: Prof. S. Green

Research: The role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents

Dear Mr./Miss./Miss./Dr./Prof.-----

With this letter I would like to ask your permission regarding the possibility to complete my Social Work research (Thesis) with the participation of respondents in your organization. My goal is to investigate the role of the social worker in the reunification of foster children with their biological parents.

The thesis involves handing out questionnaires to the social workers in your organization involved with foster care. The purpose of the questionnaires is to gather data regarding the challenges and problems in foster care. The student will hand out questionnaires to each of the social workers and collect the questionnaires on a mutually agreed time.

I thank you in advance for your time. If you have any further queries you can reach me at the following number, 028 573 6573.

Thank you very much

Angelique de Villiers